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VERA, THE MEDIUM

"MISS CIVILIZATION"

Vera, in a hushed and solemn voice, called for silence

Vera, the Medium

"Miss Civilization"

BY

RICHARD HARDING DAVIS

ILLUSTRATED

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK::::::::::::::::::::::::1912

VERA, THE MEDIUM

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VERA, THE MEDIUM

TO

VANDERHEYDEN FYLES

VERA, THE MEDIUM

PART I

HAPPY in the hope that the news was "exclusive," the *Despatch* had thrown the name of Stephen Hallowell, his portrait, a picture of his house, and the words, "At Point of Death!" across three columns. The announcement was heavy, lachrymose, bristling with the melancholy self-importance of the man who "saw the deceased, just two minutes before the train hit him."

But the effect of the news fell short of the effort. Save that city editors were irritated that the presidents of certain railroads figured hastily on slips of paper, the fact that an old man and his millions would soon be parted, left New York undisturbed.

In the early '80's this would not have been so. Then, in the uplifting of the far West, Stephen Hallowell was a national figure, in the manœuvres of the Eastern stock market an active, alert power. In those days, when a man with a few millions

was still listed as rich, his fortune was considered colossal.

A patent coupling-pin, the invention of his brother-in-law, had given him his start, and, in introducing it, and in his efforts to force it upon the new railroads of the West, he had obtained a knowledge of their affairs. From that knowledge came his wealth. That was twenty years ago. Since then giants had arisen in the land; men whose wealth made the fortune of Stephen Hallowell appear a comfortable competence, his schemes and stratagems, which, in their day, had bewildered Wall Street, as simple as the trading across the counter of a cross-roads store.

For years he had been out of it. He had lost count. Disuse and ill-health had rendered his mind feeble, made him at times suspicious, at times childishly credulous. Without friends, alone with his physician and the butler, who was also his nurse, he lived in the house that in '76, in a burst of vanity, he had built on Fifth Avenue. Then the house was a "mansion," and its front of brown sandstone the outward sign of wealth and fashion. Now, on one side, it rubbed shoulders with the shop of a man milliner, and across the street the houses had been torn down and replaced by a department store. Now, instead of

a sombre jail-like façade, his outlook was a row of waxen ladies, who, before each change of season, appeared in new and gorgeous raiment, and, across the avenue, for his approval, smiled continually.

"It is time you moved, Stephen," urged his friend and lawyer, Judge Henry Gaylor. "I can get you twice as much for this lot as you paid for both it and the house."

But Mr. Hallowell always shook his head. "Where would I go, Henry?" he would ask. "What would I do with the money? No, I will live in this house until I am carried out of it."

. . . . . .

With distaste, the irritated city editors "followed up" the three-column story of the *Despatch.*

"Find out if there's any truth in that," they commanded. "The old man won't see you, but get a talk out of Rainey. And see Judge Gaylor. He's close to Hallowell. Find out from him if that story didn't start as a bear yarn in Wall Street."

So, when Walsh of the *Despatch* was conducted by Garrett, the butler of Mr. Hallowell, upstairs to that gentleman's library, he found a group of reporters already entrenched. At the door that

opened from the library to the bedroom, the butler paused. "What paper shall I say?" he asked.

"The *Despatch*," Walsh told him.

The servant turned quickly and stared at Walsh.

He appeared the typical butler, an Englishman of over forty, heavily built, soft-moving, with ruddy, smooth-shaven cheeks and prematurely gray hair. But now from his face the look of perfunctory politeness had fallen; the subdued voice had changed to a snarl that carried with it the accents of the Tenderloin.

"So, you're the one, are you?" the man muttered.

For a moment he stood scowling; insolent, almost threatening; and then, once more, the servant opened the door and noiselessly closed it behind him.

The transition had been so abrupt, the revelation so unexpected, that the men laughed.

"I don't blame him!" said young Irving. "*I* couldn't find a single fact in the whole story. How'd your people get it—pretty straight?"

"Seemed straight to us," said Walsh.

"Well, you didn't handle it that way," returned the other. "Why didn't you quote Rainey or Gaylor? It seems to me if a man's on

the point of death"—he lowered his voice and glanced toward the closed door—"that his private doctor and his lawyer might know *something* about it."

Standing alone with his back to the window was a reporter who had greeted no one and to whom no one had spoken.

Had he held himself erect he would have been tall, but he stood slouching lazily, his shoulders bent, his hands in his pockets. When he spoke his voice was in keeping with the indolence of his bearing. It was soft, hesitating, carrying with it the courteous deference of the South. Only his eyes showed that to what was going forward he was alert and attentive.

"Is Dr. Rainey Mr. Hallowell's family doctor?" he asked.

Irving surveyed him in amused superiority.

"He is!" he answered. "You been long in New York?" he asked.

Upon the stranger the sarcasm was lost, or he chose to ignore it, for he answered simply, "No, I'm a New Orleans boy. I've just been taken on the *Republic*."

"Welcome to our city," said Irving. "What do you think of our Main Street?"

From the hall a tall portly man entered the

room with the assurance of one much at home here and, with an exclamation, Irving fell upon him.

"Good-morning, Judge," he called. He waved at him the clipping from the *Despatch*. "Have you seen this?"

Judge Gaylor accepted the slip of paper gingerly, and in turn moved his fine head pompously toward each of the young men. Most of them were known to him, but for the moment he preferred to appear too deeply concerned to greet them. With an expression of shocked indignation, he recognized only Walsh.

"Yes, I have seen it," he said, "and there is not a word of truth in it! Mr. Walsh, I am surprised! *You*, of all people!"

"We got it on very good authority," said the reporter.

"But why not call me up and get the facts?" demanded the Judge. "I was here until twelve o'clock, and——"

"Here!" interrupted Irving. "Then he did have a collapse?"

Judge Gaylor swung upon his heel.

"Certainly not," he retorted angrily. "I was here on business, and I have never known his mind more capable, more alert." He lifted his

hands with an enthusiastic gesture. "I wish you could have seen him!"

"Well," urged Irving, "how about our seeing him now?"

For a moment Judge Gaylor permitted his annoyance to appear, but he at once recovered and, murmuring cheerfully, "Certainly, certainly; I'll try to arrange it," turned to the butler who had re-entered the room.

"Garrett," he inquired, "is Mr. Hallowell awake yet?" As he asked the question his eyebrows rose; with an almost imperceptible shake of the head he signalled for an answer in the negative.

"Well, there you are!" the Judge exclaimed heartily. "I can't wake him, even to oblige you. In a word, gentlemen, Stephen Hallowell has never been in better health, mentally and bodily. You can say that from me—and that's all there is to say."

"Then, we can say," persisted Irving, "that *you* say, that Walsh's story is a fake?"

"You can say it is not true," corrected Gaylor. "That's all, gentlemen." The audience was at an end. The young men moved toward the hall and Judge Gaylor turned to the bedroom. As he did so, he found that the new man on the *Republic* still held his ground.

"Could I have a word with you, sir?" the stranger asked. The reporters halted jealously. Again Gaylor showed his impatience.

"About Mr. Hallowell's health?" he demanded. "There's nothing more to say."

"No, it's not about his health," ventured the reporter.

"Well, not now. I am very late this morning." The Judge again moved to the bedroom and the reporter, as though accepting the verdict, started to follow the others. As he did so, as though in explanation or as a warning he added: "You *said* to always come to you for the facts." The lawyer halted, hesitated. "What facts do you want?" he asked. The reporter bowed, and waved his broad felt hat toward the listening men. In polite embarrassment he explained what he had to say could not be spoken in their presence.

Something in the manner of the stranger led Judge Gaylor to pause. He directed Garrett to accompany the reporters from the room. Then, with mock politeness, he turned to the one who remained. "I take it, you are a new-comer in New York journalism. What is your name?" he asked.

"My name is Homer Lee," said the Southerner. "I am a New Orleans boy. I've been only

a month in your city. Judge," he began earnestly, but in a voice which still held the drawl of the South, "I met a man from home last week on Broadway. He belonged to that spiritualistic school on Carondelet Street. He knows all that's going on in the spook world, and he tells me the ghost raisers have got their hooks into the old man pretty deep. Is that so?"

The bewilderment of Judge Gaylor was complete and, without question, genuine.

"I don't know what you mean," he said.

"My informant tells me," continued the reporter, "that Mr. Hallowell has embraced—if that's what you call it—spiritualism."

Gaylor started forward.

"What!" he roared.

Unmoved, the other regarded the Judge keenly.

"Spiritualism," he repeated, "and that a bunch of these mediums have got him so hypnotized he can't call his soul his own, or his money, either. Is that true?"

Judge Gaylor's outburst was overwhelming. That it was genuine Mr. Lee, observing him closely, was convinced.

"Of all the outrageous, ridiculous"—the Judge halted, gasping for words—"and libellous statements!" he went on. "If you print that," he

thundered, "Mr. Hallowell will sue your paper for half a million dollars. Can't you see the damage you would do? Can't your people see that if the idea got about that he was unable to direct his own affairs, that he was in the hands of mediums, it would invalidate everything he does? After his death, every act of his at this time, every paper he had signed, would be suspected, and—and"—stammered the Judge as his imagination pictured what might follow—"they might even attack his will!" He advanced truculently. "Do you mean to publish this libel?"

Lee moved his shoulders in deprecation. "I'm afraid we *must*," he said.

"You must!" demanded Gaylor. "After what I've told you? Do you think I'm lying to you?"

"No," said the reporter; "I don't think you are. Looks more like you didn't know."

"Not know? I?" Gaylor laughed hysterically. "I am his lawyer. I am his best friend! Who *will* you believe?" He stepped to the table and pressed an electric button, and Garrett appeared in the hall. "Tell Dr. Rainey I want to see him," Gaylor commanded, "and return with him."

As they waited, Judge Gaylor paced quickly

to and fro. "I've had to deny some pretty silly stories about Mr. Hallowell," he said, "but of all the absurd, malicious— There's some enemy back of this; some one in Wall Street is doing this. But I'll find him—I'll—" he was interrupted by the entrance of the butler and Dr. Rainey, Mr. Hallowell's personal physician.

Rainey was a young man with a weak face, and knowing, shifting eyes that blinked behind a pair of eye-glasses. To conceal an indecision of character of which he was quite conscious, he assumed a manner that, according to whom he addressed, was familiar or condescending. At one of the big hospitals he had been an ambulance surgeon and resident physician, later he had started upon a somewhat doubtful career as a medical "expert." Only two years had passed since the police and the reporters of the Tenderloin had ceased calling him "Doc." In a celebrated criminal case in which Gaylor had acted as chief counsel, he had found Rainey complaisant and apparently totally without the moral sense. And when in Garrett he had discovered for Mr. Hallowell a model servant, he had also urged upon his friend, for his resident physician, his *protêgé* Rainey.

Still at white heat, the older man began abruptly:

"This gentleman is from the *Republic*. He is going to publish a story that Mr. Hallowell has fallen under the influence of mediums, clairvoyants; that everything he does is on advice from the spirit world—" he turned sharply upon Lee. "Is that right?" The reporter nodded.

"You can see the effect of such a story. It would invalidate every act of Mr. Hallowell's!"

Dr. Rainey laughed offensively.

"It might," he said, "but who'd believe it?"

"He believes it!" cried Gaylor, "or he pretends to believe it. Tell him!" he commanded. "He won't believe me. Does Mr. Hallowell associate with mediums, and spirits—and spooks?"

Again the young doctor laughed.

"Of course not!" he exclaimed. "It's not worth answering, Judge. You ought to treat it with silent contempt." From behind his glasses he winked at the reporter with a jocular, intimate smile. He was adapting himself to what he imagined was his company. "Where did you pick up that pipe dream?" he asked.

Without answering, the Southerner regarded him steadily with inquiring, interested eyes. The doctor coughed nervously and turned to Judge Gaylor. In the manner of a cross-examination Gaylor called up his next witness.

"Garrett, does any one visit Mr. Hallowell without your knowledge?" he asked. "You may not open the door for him, but you know every one who gets in to see Mr. Hallowell, do you not?"

"Every one, sir."

"Do you admit any mediums, palm-readers, or people of that sort?"

"Certainly not," returned the butler.

"Dr. Rainey," he added, "would not permit it, sir."

Gaylor stamped his foot with impatience.

"Do you admit any one," he demanded, "without Dr. Rainey's permission?"

"No, sir!" The reply could not have rung with greater emphasis. Triumphantly, Gaylor, with a wave of the hand, as though saying, "Take the witness," turned to Lee. "There you are," he cried. "Now, are you satisfied?"

The reporter moved slowly toward the door. "I am satisfied," he said, "that the man doesn't admit any one without Dr. Rainey's permission."

Indignantly, as though to intercept him, Judge Gaylor stepped forward. Both Rainey and himself spoke together.

"What do you mean by that?" Rainey demanded.

"Are you trying to be insolent, sir?" cried the Judge.

Lee smiled pleasantly. "I had no intention of being insolent," he said. "We *have* the facts—I only came to give you a chance to explain them."

Gaylor lost all patience.

"What facts?" he shouted. "What facts? That mediums come here?"

"Yes," said Lee.

"When?" Gaylor cried. "Tell me that! When?"

Lee regarded the older man thoughtfully.

"Well, to-day is Thursday," he said. "They were here Monday morning, and Tuesday morning—and—the one they call Vera—will be here in half an hour."

Rainey ran across the room, stretching out eager, detaining hands.

"See here!" he begged. "We can fix this!"

"Fix it?" said the reporter. "Not with me, you can't." He turned to the door and found Garrett barring his exit. He halted, fell back on his heels, and straightened his shoulders. For the first time they saw how tall he was.

"Get out of my way," he said. The butler hesitated and fell back. Lee walked into the hall.

"Fix it?" said the reporter. "Not with me, you can't"

"I'll leave you gentlemen to fight it out among you," he said. "It's a better story than I thought."

As he descended to the floor below, the men remained motionless. The face of Judge Gaylor seemed to have grown older. When the front door closed, he turned and searched the countenance of each of his companions. The butler had dropped into a chair muttering and beating his fist into his open palm.

Gaylor's voice was hardly louder than a whisper. "Is this true?" he asked.

Like a cur dog pinned in a corner and forced to fight, Rainey snarled at him evilly. "Of course it's true," he said.

"You've let these people see him!" cried Gaylor. "After I forbade it? After I told you what would happen?"

"He would see them," Rainey answered hotly. "'Twas better I chose them than——"

Gaylor raised his clenched hands and took a sudden step forward. The Doctor backed hastily against the library table. "Don't you come near me!" he stammered. "Don't you touch me."

"And you've lied to me!" cried Gaylor. "You've deceived me. You—you jailbirds—you idiots." His voice rose hysterically. "And do you think," he demanded fiercely, "I'll help you now?"

"No!" said the butler.

The word caught the Judge in the full rush of his anger. He turned stupidly as though he had not heard aright. "What?" he asked. From the easy-chair the butler regarded him with sullen, hostile eyes.

"No!" he repeated. "We don't think you'll help us. You never meant to help us. You've never thought of any one but yourself."

The face of the older man was filled with reproach.

"Jim!" he protested.

"Don't do that!" commanded the butler sharply. "I've told you not to do that."

The Judge moved his head slowly in amazement. The tone of reproach was still in his voice.

"I thought *you* could understand," he said. "It doesn't matter about him. But you! You should have seen what I was doing!"

"I saw what you were doing," the butler replied. "Buying stocks, buying a country place. You didn't wait for him to die. What were we getting?"

With returning courage, Rainey nodded vigorously.

"That's right, all right," he protested. "What were we getting?"

"What were you getting?" demanded Gaylor, eagerly. "If you'd only left him to me, till he signed the new will, you'd have had everything. It only needs his signature."

"Yes," interrupted Garrett contemptuously; "that's all it needs."

"Oh, he'd have signed it!" cried Gaylor. "But what's it worth *now!* Nothing! Thanks to you two—nothing! They'll claim undue influence, they'll claim he signed it under the influence of mediums—of ghosts." His voice shook with anger and distress. "You've ruined me!" he cried. "You've ruined me."

He turned and paced from them, his fingers interlacing, his teeth biting upon his lower lip. The two other men glanced at each other uncomfortably; their silence seemed to assure Gaylor that already they regretted what they had done. He stood over Garrett, and for an instant laid his hand upon his shoulder. His voice now was sane and cold.

"I've worked three years for this," he said. "And for you, too, Jim. You know that. I've worked on his vanity, on his fear of death, on his damn superstition. When he talked of restitution, of giving the money to his niece, I asked 'Why?' I said, 'Leave it for a great monument

to your memory. Isn't it better that ten million dollars should be spent in good works in your name than that it should go to a chit of a child to be wasted by some fortune-hunter? And—then—I evolved the Hallowell Institute, university, hospital, library, all under one roof, all under one direction; and I would have been the director. We should have handled ten millions of dollars! I'd have made you both so rich," he cried savagely, "that in two years you'd have drunk yourselves into a mad-house. And you couldn't trust me! You've filled this house with fakes and palm-readers. And, now, every one will know just what he is—a senile, half-witted old man who was clay in my hands, clay in my hands—and you've robbed me of him, you've robbed me of him!" His voice, broken with anger and disappointment, rose in an hysterical wail. As though to meet it a bell rang shrilly. Gaylor started and stood with eyes fixed on the door of the bedroom. The three men eyed each other guiltily.

The butler was the first to recover. With mask-like face he hastened noiselessly across the room. In his tones of usual authority, Gaylor stopped him.

"Tell Mr. Hallowell," he directed, "that his niece and District Attorney Winthrop will be

here any moment. Ask him if he wishes me to see them, or if he will talk to them himself?"

When the faithful servant had entered the bedroom Gaylor turned to Rainey.

"When do these mediums come to-day?" he asked.

Rainey stared sulkily at the floor.

"I think they're here now—downstairs," he answered. "Garrett generally hides them there till you're out of the house."

"Indeed," commented Gaylor dryly. "After Winthrop and Miss Coates have gone, I want to talk with your friends."

"Now, see here, Judge," whined Rainey; "don't make trouble. It isn't as bad as you think. The old man's only investigating——"

"Hush!" commanded the Judge.

From the bedroom, leaning on the butler's arm, Stephen Hallowell came stumbling toward them and, with a sigh, sank into an invalid's chair that was placed for him between the fire and the long library table. He was a very feeble, very old man, with a white face, and thin, white hair, but with a mouth and lower jaw as hard and uncompromising as those of a skull. His eyes, which were strangely brilliant and young-looking, peered suspiciously from under ragged white eyebrows.

But when they fell upon the Doctor, the eyes became suddenly credulous, pleading, filled with self-pity.

"I'm a very sick man, Doctor," said Mr. Hallowell.

Judge Gaylor bustled forward cheerily. "Nonsense, Stephen, nonsense," he cried; "you look a different man this morning. Doesn't he, Doctor?"

"Sure he does!" assented Rainey. "Little sleep was all he needed." Mr. Hallowell shook his head petulantly. "Not at all!" he protested. "That was a very serious attack. This morning my head hurts—hurts me to think——"

"Perhaps," said Gaylor, "you'd prefer that I talked to your niece."

"No!" exclaimed the invalid excitedly. "I want to see her myself. I want to tell her, once and for all—" He checked himself and frowned at the Doctor. "You needn't wait," he said. "And Doctor," he added meaningly, "after these people go, you come back."

With a conscious glance at the Judge, Rainey nodded and left them.

"No," continued the old man; "I want to talk to my niece myself. But I don't want to talk to Winthrop. He's too clever a young man, Winthrop. In the merger case, you remember—had

me on the stand for three hours. Made me talk too." The mind of the old man suddenly veered at a tangent. "How the devil can Helen retain him?" he demanded peevishly. "She can't retain him. She hasn't any money. And he's District Attorney too. It's against the law. Is he doing it as a speculation? Does he want to marry her?"

Judge Gaylor laughed soothingly.

"Heavens, no!" he said. "She's in his office, that's all. When she took this craze to be independent of you, he gave her a position as secretary, or as stenographer, or something. She's probably told him her story, her side of it, and he's helping her out of charity." The Judge smiled tolerantly. "He does that sort of thing, I believe."

The old man struck the library table with his palm. "I wish he'd mind his own business," he cried. "It's my money. She has no claim to it, never had any claim——"

The Judge interrupted quickly.

"That's all right, Stephen; that's all right," he said. "Don't excite yourself. Just get what you're to say straight in your mind and stick to it. Remember," he went on, as though coaching a child in a task already learned, "there never was a written agreement."

"No!" muttered Hallowell. "Never was!"

"Repeat this to yourself," commanded the Judge. "The understanding between you and your brother-in-law was that if you placed his patent on the market, for the first five years you would share the profits equally. After the five years, all rights in the patent became yours. It was unfortunate," commented the Judge dryly, "that your brother-in-law and your sister died before the five years were up, especially as the patent did not begin to make money until after five years. Remember—until after five years."

"Until after five years," echoed Mr. Hallowell. "It was over six years," he went on excitedly, "before it made a cent. And, then, it was my money—and anything I give my niece is charity. She's not entitled——"

Garrett appeared at the door. "Miss Coates," he announced, "and Mr. Winthrop." Judge Gaylor raised a hand for silence, and as Mr. Hallowell sank back in his chair, Helen Coates, the only child of Catherine Coates, his sister, and the young District Attorney of New York came into the library. Miss Coates was a woman of between twenty-five and thirty, capable, and self-reliant. She had a certain beauty of a severe type, but an harassed expression about her eyes made

her appear to be always frowning. At times, in a hardening of the lower part of her face, she showed a likeness to her uncle. Like him, in speaking, also, her manner was positive and decided.

In age the young man who accompanied her was ten years her senior, but where her difficulties had made her appear older than she really was, the enthusiasm with which he had thrown himself against those of his own life, had left him young.

The rise of Winthrop had been swift and spectacular. Almost as soon as he graduated from the college in the little "up-state" town where he had been educated, and his family had always lived, he became the prosecuting attorney of that town, and later, at Albany, represented the district in the Assembly. From Albany he entered a law office in New York City, and in the cause of reform had fought so many good fights that on an independent ticket, much to his surprise, he had been lifted to the high position he now held. No more in his manner than in his appearance did Winthrop suggest the popular conception of his rôle. He was not professional, not mysterious. Instead, he was sane, cheerful, tolerant. It was his philosophy to believe that the world was innocent until it was proved guilty.

He was a bachelor and, except for two sisters who had married men of prominence in New York and who moved in a world of fashion into which he had not penetrated, he was alone.

When the visitors entered, Mr. Hallowell, without rising, greeted his niece cordially.

"Ah, Helen! I am glad to see you," he called, and added reproachfully, "at last."

"How do you do, sir?" returned Miss Helen stiffly. With marked disapproval she bowed to Judge Gaylor.

"And our District Attorney," cried Mr. Hallowell. "Pardon my not rising, won't you? I haven't seen you, sir, since you tried to get the Grand Jury to indict me." He chuckled delightedly. "You didn't succeed," he taunted.

Winthrop shook hands with him, smiling. "Don't blame *me*," he said. "I did *my* best. I'm glad to see you in such good spirits, Mr. Hallowell. I feared, by the *Despatch*——"

"Lies, lies," interrupted Hallowell curtly. "You know Judge Gaylor?"

As he shook hands, Winthrop answered that the Judge and he were old friends; that they knew each other well.

"Know each other so well!" returned the Judge, "that we ought to be old enemies."

The younger man nodded appreciatively.

"That's true!" he laughed, "only I didn't think you'd admit it."

With light sarcasm Mr. Hallowell inquired whether Winthrop was with them in his official capacity.

"Oh, don't suggest that!" begged Winthrop; "you'll be having me indicted next. No, sir, I am here without any excuse whatsoever. I am just interfering as a friend of this young lady."

"Good," commented Hallowell. "I'd be sorry to have my niece array counsel against me—especially such distinguished counsel. Sit down, Helen."

Miss Coates balanced herself on the edge of a chair and spoke in cool, business-like tones. "Mr. Hallowell," she began, "I came——"

"Mr. Hallowell?" objected her uncle.

"Uncle Stephen," Miss Coates again began, "I wish to be as brief as possible. I asked you to see me to-day, because I hoped that by talking things over we might avoid lawsuits and litigation——"

Mr. Hallowell nodded his approval. "Yes," he said encouragingly.

"I have told Mr. Winthrop what the trouble is,"

Miss Coates went on, "and he agrees with me that I have been very unjustly treated——"

"By whom?" interrupted Hallowell.

"By you," said his niece.

"Wait, Helen," commanded the old man. "Have you also told Mr. Winthrop," he demanded, "that I have made a will in your favor? That, were I to die to-night, you would inherit ten millions of dollars? Is that the injustice of which you complain?"

Judge Gaylor gave an exclamation of pleasure.

"Good!" he applauded. "Excellent!"

Hallowell turned indignantly to Winthrop. "And did she tell you also," he demanded, "that for three years I have urged her to make a home in this house? That I have offered her an income as large as I would give my own daughter, and that she has refused both offers. And what's more"—in his excitement his voice rose hysterically—"by working publicly for her living she has made *me* appear mean and uncharitable, and——"

"That's just it," interrupted Miss Coates. "It isn't a question of charity."

"Will you allow me?" said Winthrop soothingly. "Your niece contends, sir," he explained, "that this money you offered her is not yours to

offer. She claims it belongs to her. That it's what should have been her father's share of the profits on the Coates-Hallowell coupling-pin. But, as you have willed your niece so much money, although half of it is hers already, I advised her not to fight. Going to law is an expensive business. But she has found out—and that's what brings me uptown this morning—that you intend to make a new will, and leave all her money and your own to establish the Hallowell Institute. Now," Winthrop continued, with a propitiating smile, "Miss Coates also would like to be a philanthropist, in her own way, with her own money. And she wishes to warn you that, unless you deliver up what is due her, she will proceed against you."

Judge Gaylor was the first to answer.

"Mr. Winthrop," he said impressively, "I give you my word, there is not one dollar due Miss Coates, except what Mr. Hallowell pleases to give her——"

Miss Coates contradicted him sharply. "That is not so," she said. She turned to her uncle. "You and my father," she declared, "agreed in writing you would share the profits always." Mr. Hallowell looked from his niece to his lawyer. The lawyer, eying him apprehensively, nodded.

With the patient voice of one who tried to reason with an unreasonable child, Mr. Hallowell began. "Helen," he said, "I have told you many times there never was such an agreement. There was a verbal——"

"And I repeat, I saw it," said Miss Coates.

"When?" asked Hallowell.

"I saw it first when I was fifteen," answered the young woman steadily, "and two years later, before mother died, she showed it to me again. It was with father's papers."

"Miss Coates," asked the Judge, "where is this agreement now?"

For a moment Miss Coates hesitated. Her dislike for Gaylor was so evident that, to make it less apparent, she lowered her eyes. "My uncle should be able to tell you," she said evenly. "He was my father's executor. But, when he returned my father's papers"—she paused and then, although her voice fell to almost a whisper, continued defiantly, "the agreement was not with them."

There was a moment's silence. To assure himself the others had heard as he did, Mr. Hallowell glanced quickly from Winthrop to Gaylor. He half rose from his chair and leaned across the table.

"What!" he demanded.

His niece looked at him steadily.

"You heard what I said," she answered.

The old man leaned farther forward.

"So!" he cried; "so! I am not only doing you an injustice, but I am a thief! Mr. Winthrop," he cried appealingly, "do you appreciate the seriousness of this?"

Winthrop nodded cheerfully. "It's certainly pretty serious," he assented.

"It is so serious," cried Mr. Hallowell, "that I welcome you into this matter. Now, we will settle it once and forever." He turned to his niece. "I have tried to be generous," he cried; "I have tried to be kind, and you insult me in my own house." He pressed the button that summoned the butler from the floor below. "Gentlemen, this interview is at an end. From now on this matter is in the hands of my lawyer. We will settle this in the courts."

With an exclamation of pleasure that was an acceptance of his challenge, Miss Coates rose.

"That is satisfactory to me," she said. Winthrop turned to Mr. Hallowell.

"Could I have a few minutes' talk with Judge Gaylor now?" he asked. "Not as anybody's counsel," he explained; "just as an old 'enemy' of his?"

"Well, not here," protested the old man querulously. "I'm—I'm expecting some friends here. Judge, take Mr. Winthrop to the drawing-room downstairs." He turned to Garrett, who had appeared in answer to his summons, and told him to bring Dr. Rainey to the library. The butler left the room and, as Gaylor and Winthrop followed, the latter asked Miss Coates if he might expect to see her at the "Office." She told him that she was now on her way there. Without acknowledging the presence of her uncle, she had started to follow the others, when Mr. Hallowell stopped her.

After they were alone, for a moment he sat staring at her, his eyes filled with dislike and with a suggestion of childish spite. "I might as well tell you," he began, "that after what you said this morning, I will never give you a single dollar of my money."

The tone in which his niece replied to him was no more conciliatory than his own. "You cannot give it to me," she answered, "because it is not yours to give." As though to add impressiveness to what she was about to say, or to prevent his interrupting her, she raised her hand. So interested in each other were the old man and the girl that neither noticed the appearance in the door

of Dr. Rainey and the butler, who halted, hesitating, waiting permission to enter.

"That money belongs to me," said Miss Coates slowly, "and as sure as my mother is in Heaven and her spirit is guiding me, that money will be given me."

In the pause that followed, a swift and singular change came over the face of Mr. Hallowell. He stared at his niece as though fascinated. His lower lip dropped in awe. The look of hostility gave way to one of intense interest. His voice was hardly louder than a whisper.

"What do you mean?" he demanded.

The girl looked at him, uncomprehending. "What do I mean?" she repeated.

"When you said," he stammered eagerly, "that the spirit of your mother was guiding you, what did you mean?"

In the doorway, Rainey and the butler started. Each threw at the other a quick glance of concern.

"Why," exclaimed the girl impatiently, "her influence, her example, what she taught me."

"Oh!" exclaimed the old man. He leaned back with an air almost of disappointment.

"When she was alive?" he said.

"Of course," answered the girl.

"Of course," repeated the uncle. "I thought you meant—" He looked suspiciously at her and shook his head. "Never mind," he added. "Well," he went on cynically, striving to cover up the embarrassment of the moment, "your mother's spirit will probably feel as deep an interest in her brother as in her daughter. We shall see, we shall see which of us two she is going to help." He turned to Garrett and Rainey in the hall. "Take my niece to the door, Garrett," he directed.

As soon as Miss Coates had disappeared, Hallowell turned to Rainey, his face lit with pleased and childish anticipation.

"Well," he whispered eagerly, "is she here?"

Rainey nodded and glanced in the direction opposite to the one Miss Coates had taken. "She's been waiting half an hour. And the Professor too."

"Bring them at once," commanded Mr. Hallowell excitedly. "And then shut the door—and—and tell the Judge I can't see him—tell him I'm too tired to see him. Understand?"

Rainey peered cautiously over the railing of the stairs to the first floor, and then beckoned to some one who apparently was waiting at the end of the hall.

"Miss Vera, sir," he announced, "and Professor Vance."

Although but lately established in New York, the persons Dr. Rainey introduced had already made themselves comparatively well known. For the last six weeks as "headliners" at one of the vaudeville theatres, and as entertainers at private houses, under the firm name of "The Vances," they had been giving an exhibition of code and cipher signalling. They called it mind-reading. During the day, at the house of Vance and his wife, the girl, as "Vera, the Medium," furnished to all comers memories of the past or news of the future. In their profession, in all of its branches, the man and the girl were past masters. They knew it from the A, B, C of the dream book to the post-graduate work of projecting from a cabinet the spirits of the dead. As the occasion offered and paid best, they were mind-readers, clairvoyants, materializing mediums, test mediums. From them, a pack of cards, a crystal globe, the lines of the human hand, held no secrets. They found lost articles, cast horoscopes, gave advice in affairs of the heart, of business and speculation, uttered warnings of journeys over seas and against a smooth-shaven stranger. They even stooped to

foretell earthquakes, or caused to drop fluttering from the ceiling a letter straight from the Himalayas. Among those who are the gypsies of the cities, they were the aristocrats of their calling, and to them that calling was as legitimate a business as is, to the roadside gypsy, the swapping of horses. The fore-parents of each had followed that same calling, and to the children it was commonplace and matter-of-fact. It held no adventure, no moral obloquy.

"Prof." Paul Vance was a young man of under forty years. He looked like a fox. He had red eyes, alert and cunning, a long, sharp-pointed nose, a pointed red beard, and red eyebrows that slanted upward. His hair, standing erect in a pompadour, and his uplifted eyebrows gave him the watchful look of the fox when he hears suddenly the hound baying in pursuit. But no one had ever successfully pursued Vance. No one had ever driven him into a corner from which, either pleasantly, or with raging indignation, he was not able to free himself. Seven years before he had disloyally married out of the "profession" and for no other reason than that he was in love with the woman he married. She had come to seek advice from the spirit-world in regard to

taking a second husband. After several visits the spirit-world had advised Vance to advise her to marry Vance.

She did so, and though the man was still in love with his wife, he had not found her, in his work, the assistance he had hoped she might be. She still was a "believer"; in the technical vernacular of her husband—"a dope." Not even the intimate knowledge she had gained behind the scenes could persuade her that Paul, her husband, was not in constant communication with the spirit-world, or that, if he wished, he could not read the thoughts that moved slowly through her pretty head.

At the time of his marriage, the girl Vera, then a child of fourteen, had written to Vance for help. She was ill, without money, and asked for work. To him she was known as the last of a long line of people who had always been professional mediums and spiritualists, and, out of charity and from a sense of *noblesse oblige* to one of the elect of the profession, Vance had made her his assistant. He had never regretted having done so. The bread cast upon the waters was returned a thousandfold. From the first, the girl brought in money. And his wife, the older of the two, had welcomed her as a companion. After a

fashion the Vances had adopted her. In the advertisements she was described as their "ward."

Vera now was twenty-one, tall, wonderfully graceful, and of the most enchanting loveliness. Her education had been cosmopolitan. In the largest cities of America she had met persons of every class—young women, old women, mothers with married sons and daughters; women of society as it is exploited in the Sunday supplements; school-girls, shop-girls, factory-girls—all had told her their troubles; and men of every condition had come to scoff and had remained to express, more or less offensively, their admiration. Some of the younger of these, after a first visit, returned the day following, and each begged the beautiful priestess of the occult to fly with him, to live with him, to marry him. When this happened Vera would touch a button, and "Mannie" Day, who admitted visitors, and later, in the hall, searched their hats and umbrellas for initials, came on the run and threw the infatuated one out upon a cold and unfeeling sidewalk.

So Vera had seen both the seamy side of life and, in the drawing-rooms where Vance and she exhibited their mind-reading tricks, had been made much of by great ladies and, for an hour as brief as Cinderella's, had looked upon a world of

kind and well-bred people. Since she was fourteen, for seven years, this had been her life—a life as open to the public as the life of an actress, as easy of access as that of the stenographer in the hotel lobby. As a result, the girl had encased herself in a defensive armor of hardness and distrust, a protection which was rendered futile by the loveliness of her face, by the softness of her voice, by the deep, brooding eyes, and the fine forehead on which, like a crown, rested the black waves of her hair.

In her work Vera accepted, without question, the parts to which Vance assigned her. When in their mummeries they were successful, she neither enjoyed the credulity of those they had tricked nor was sobered with remorse. In the world Vance found a certain number of people with money who demanded to be fooled. It was his business and hers to meet that demand. If ever the conscience of either stirred restlessly, Vance soothed it by the easy answer that if they did not take the money some one else would. It was all in the day's work. It was her profession.

As she entered the library of Mr. Hallowell, which, with Vance, she already had visited several times, she looked like a child masquerading in her mother's finery. She suggested an ingénue

who had been suddenly sent on in the rôle of the Russian adventuress. Her slight girl's figure was draped in black lace. Her face was shaded by a large picture-hat, heavy with drooping ostrich feathers; around her shoulders was a necklace of jade, and on her wrists many bracelets of silver gilt. When she moved they rattled. As the girl advanced, smiling, to greet Mr. Hallowell, she suddenly stopped, shivered slightly, and threw her right arm across her eyes. Her left arm she stretched out over the table.

"Give me your hand!" she commanded. Dubiously, with a watchful glance at Vance, Mr. Hallowell leaned forward and took her hand.

"You have been ill," cried the girl; "very ill —I see you—I see you in a kind of faint—very lately." Her voice rose excitedly. "Yes, last night."

Mr. Hallowell protested with indignation. "You read that in the morning paper," he said.

Vera lowered her arm from her eyes and turned them reproachfully on him.

"I don't read the *Despatch*," she answered.

Mr. Hallowell drew back suspiciously. "I didn't say it was the *Despatch*," he returned.

Vance quickly interposed. "You don't have to say it," he explained with glibness; "you

thought it. And Vera read your thoughts. You *were* thinking of the *Despatch*, weren't you? Well, there you are! It's wonderful!"

"Wonderful? Nonsense!" mocked Mr. Hallowell. "She did read it in the paper or Rainey told her."

The girl shrugged her shoulders patiently. "If you would rather find out you were ill from the newspapers than from the spirit-world," she inquired, "why do you ask me here?"

"I ask you here, young woman," exclaimed Hallowell, sinking back in his chair, "because I hoped you would tell me something I can't learn from the newspapers. But you haven't been able to do it yet. My dear young lady," exclaimed the old man wistfully, "I *want* to believe, but I must be convinced. No tricks with me! I can explain how you might have found out everything you have told me. Give me a sign!" He beat the flat of his hand upon the table. "Show me something I can't explain!"

"Mr. Hallowell is quite right, Vera," said Vance. "He is entering what is to him a new world, full of mysteries, and that caution which in this world has made him so successful——"

With an exclamation, Hallowell cut short the patter of the showman.

"Yes, yes," he interrupted petulantly; "I tell you, I want to believe. Convince me."

Considering the situation with pursed lips and thoughtful eyes, Vera gazed at the old man, frowning. Finally she asked, "Have you witnessed our demonstrations of mind-reading?"

Mr. Hallowell snorted. "Certainly not," he replied; "it's a trick!"

"A trick!" cried the girl indignantly, "to read a man's mind—to see right through your forehead, through your skull, into your brain? Is that a trick?" She turned sharply to Vance. "Show him!" she commanded; "show him!" She crossed rapidly to the window and stood looking down into the street, with her back to the room.

Vance, with his back turned to Vera, stood close to the table, on the other side of which Hallowell was reclining in his arm-chair. Vance picked up a pen-holder.

"Think of what I have in my hand, please," he said. "What is this, Vera?" he asked. The girl, gazing from the window at the traffic in the avenue below her, answered with indifference, "A pen-holder."

"Yes, what about it?" snapped Vance.

"Gold pen-holder," Vera answered more rap-

idly. "Much engraving—initials S. H.—Mr. Hallowell's initials——"

"There is a date too. Can you——"

"December—" Vera hesitated.

"Go on," commanded Vance.

"Twenty-five, one, eight, eight, six; one thousand eight hundred and eighty-six." She moved her shoulders impatiently.

"Oh, tell him to think of something difficult," she said.

From behind Mr. Hallowell's chair Rainey signalled to Vance to take from the table a photograph frame of silver which held the picture of a woman.

Vance picked it up, holding it close to him.

"What have I here, Vera?" he asked.

Hallowell, seeing what Vance held in his hand, leaned forward. "Put that down!" he commanded. But Vera had already begun to answer.

"A picture, a picture of a young woman. Ask him to think of who it is and I will tell him."

At the words Mr. Hallowell hesitated, frowned, and then nodded.

"It is his sister," called Vera. "Her name was—I seem to get a 'Catherine'—yes, that's it; Catherine Coates. She is no longer with us. She passed into the spirit-world three years ago."

The girl turned suddenly and approached the table, holding her head high, as though offended. "How do you explain that trick?" she demanded.

Mr. Hallowell moved uneasily in his chair. "Oh, the picture's been on my desk each time you've been here," he answered dubiously. "Rainey could have told you."

"As a matter of fact, I didn't," said Rainey.

Hallowell's eyes lightened with interest. "Didn't you?" he asked. He turned to Vera. "If you can read my mind," he challenged—"you," he added, pointing at Vance, "keep out of this now—tell me of what I am thinking." As Vance drew back, Rainey and himself exchanged a quick glance of apprehension, but the girl promptly closed her eyes, and at once, in a dull, measured tone, began to speak.

"You were thinking you would like to ask a question of some one in the spirit," she recited. "But you are afraid. You do not trust me. You will wait until I give you a sign; then you will ask that question of some one dear to you, who has passed beyond, and she will answer, and your troubles will be at an end." She opened her eyes and stared at Mr. Hallowell like one coming out of a dream. "What did I say?" she asked. "Was I right?"

Hallowell sank back in his chair, shaking his head.

"Yes," he began grudgingly, "but——"

With an eagerness hardly concealed, Vance interrupted.

"What is the question you wish to ask?" he begged.

With a frown of suspicion, Hallowell turned from him to Rainey.

"I don't think I ought to let them know," he questioned; "do you?" But his attention was sharply diverted.

Vera, in a hushed and solemn voice, called for silence.

"My control," she explained—her tone was deep and awestruck—"is trying to communicate with me."

Vance gave an exclamation of concern. The prospect of the phenomena Vera promised seemed to fill him with delightful expectations. "Be very quiet," he cautioned, "do not disturb her."

Deeply impressed, Mr. Hallowell struggled from his chair. Unaided, he moved to below the table and leaning against it looked, with unwilling but fascinated interest, at Vera's uplifted face.

"Some one in the spirit," Vera chanted, in an

unemotional, drugged voice, "wishes to speak to Mr. Hallowell. Give me your hand."

"Quick!" directed Vance, "give her your hand. Take her hand."

"Yes, he is here," Vera continued. "A woman has a message for you, she is standing close beside you. She is holding out her arms. And she is trying, so hard, to tell you something. What is it?" the girl questioned. "Oh, what is it? Tell *me*," she begged. "Can't you tell me?"

Hallowell eyed her greedily, waiting almost without breathing for her words. The hand with which he held hers crushed her rings into her fingers.

"What sort?"—whispered the old man. "What sort of a woman?"

With eyes still closed, swaying slightly and with abrupt shudders running down her body, the girl continued in dull, fateful tones.

"She is a fair woman; about forty-five. She is speaking. She calls to you, 'Brother, brother.'" Vera's voice rose excitedly. "It is the woman in the picture; your sister! Catherine! I see it written above her head—Catherine. In letters of light." She turned suddenly and fiercely. "Ask her your question!" she commanded. "Ask her your question, *now!*"

By the sudden swaying forward of Vance and Rainey, in the intent look in their eyes, it was evident that a crisis had approached. But Mr. Hallowell, terrified and trembling, shrank back. His voice broke hysterically. "No, no!" he pleaded. Both anger and disappointment showed in the face of Vance and Rainey; but the girl, as though detached from any human concerns, continued unmoved. "I see another figure," she recited. "A young girl, but she is of this world. I seem to get an H. Yes. Helen, in letters of fire."

"My niece, Helen!" Hallowell whispered hoarsely.

"Yes, your niece," chanted the girl. Her voice rose and thrilled. "And I see much gold," she cried. "Between the two women, heaps of gold. Everywhere I look I see gold. And, now, the other woman, your sister, is trying to speak to you. Listen! She calls to you, 'Brother!' "

So centred was the interest of those in the room, so compelling the sound of the girl's voice, that, unnoticed, the sliding doors to the library were slipped apart. Unobserved, Judge Gaylor and Winthrop halted in the doorway. To the Judge the meaning of the scene was instantly apparent. His face flushed furiously. Winthrop, uncom-

prehending, gazed unconcerned over Gaylor's shoulder. The voice of Vera rose hysterically to her climax.

"She bids me tell you," Vera cried; "'Tell my brother——'"

Gaylor swept toward her.

"What damned farce is this?" he shouted.

The effect of the interruption was instant and startling. Mr. Hallowell, who, in the last few minutes, had believed he was listening to a voice from the dead, collapsed upon the shoulder of Rainey, who sprang to support him. Like a somnambulist wrenched from sleep, Vera gave a scream of fright, half genuine, half assumed, and swayed as though about to fall. Vance caught her in his arms. He turned on Gaylor, his cunning red eyes flashing evilly.

"You brute!" he cried; "you might have killed her."

Between her sobs, Vera, her head upon the shoulder of Vance, whispered a question. As quickly, under cover of muttered sympathy, Vance answered: "Gaylor. The Judge."

Still slightly swaying, Vera stood upright. She passed her hand vaguely before her eyes. "Where am I?" she asked feebly. "Where am I?"

Gaylor shook his fist at the girl.

"You know where you are!" he thundered; "and you know where you're going—you're going to jail!"

In the hush that followed Vera drew herself to her full height. She regarded Gaylor wonderingly, haughtily, as though he were some drunken intruder from the street.

"Are you speaking to me?" she asked.

"Yes, to you," shouted the lawyer. "You're an impostor, and a swindler, and—and——"

Winthrop pushed between them.

"Yes, and she's a woman," he said briskly. "If you want a row, talk to the man."

To this point the scene had brought to Vera no emotion save the excitement that is felt by the one who is struggling to escape. The appearance of a champion added a new interest. Through no fault of her own, she had learned by experience that to the one man who annoyed her there always were six to spring to her protection. So the glance she covertly turned upon Winthrop was one less of gratitude than curiosity.

But at the first sight of him the girl started, her eyes lit with recognition, her face flushed. And then, although the man was in no way regarding her, her eyes filled, and in mortification and dismay she blushed crimson.

His anger still unsatisfied, Gaylor turned upon Vance.

"And you," he cried; "you're going to jail too. I'll drive——"

The voice of Mr. Hallowell, shaken with pain and distress, rose feebly, beseechingly. "Henry!" he begged. "I can't stand it!"

"Judge Gaylor!" thundered Rainey, "I won't be responsible if you keep this up."

With an exclamation of remorse, Vera ran to the side of the old man. With Rainey on his other hand, she raised him upright upon his feet.

"Lean on me," begged the girl breathlessly. "I'm very strong. Lean on me."

Mr. Hallowell shook his head. "No, child," he protested, "not you." He turned to his old friend. "You help me, Henry," he begged.

With the authority of the medical man, Rainey waved Vance into the bedroom. "Close those windows," he ordered. "You help me!" he commanded of Gaylor. "Put your arm under him."

Mr. Hallowell, protesting feebly and leaning heavily upon the two men, stumbled into the bedroom, and the door was shut behind him.

For a moment the girl and the man stood in

silence, and then, as though suddenly conscious of her presence, Winthrop turned and smiled.

The girl did not answer his smile. From under the shadow of the picture-hat and the ostrich feathers her eyes regarded him searchingly, watchfully.

For the first time, Winthrop had the chance to observe her. He saw that she was very young, that her clothes cruelly disguised her, that she was only a child masquerading as a brigand, that her face was distractingly lovely. Having noted this, the fact that she had driven several grown men to abuse and vituperation struck him as being extremely humorous; nor did he try to conceal his amusement. But the watchfulness in the eyes of the girl did not relax.

"I'm afraid I interfered with your seance," said the District Attorney.

The girl regarded him warily, like a fencer fixing her eyes on those of her opponent. There was a pause which lasted so long that had the silence continued it would have been rude. "Well," the girl returned at last, timidly, "that's what the city expects you to do, is it not?"

Winthrop laughed. "How did you know who I was?" he asked, and then added quickly, "Of course, you're a mind-reader."

For the first time the girl smiled. Winthrop found it a charming smile, wistful and confiding.

"I don't have to ask the spirit-world," she said, "to tell *me* who is District Attorney of New York."

"Yes," said the District Attorney; "yes, I suppose you have to be pretty well acquainted with some of the laws—those about mediums?"

"If you knew as much about other laws," began Vera, "as I do about the law—" She broke off and again smiled upon him.

"Then you probably know," said Winthrop, "that what our excited friend said to you just now is legally quite true?"

The smile passed from the face of the girl. She looked at the young man with fine disdain, as a great lady might reprove with a glance the man who snapped a camera at her.

"Yes?" she asked. "Well, what are you going to do about it—arrest me?" Mocking him, in a burlesque of melodrama, she held out her arms. "Don't put the handcuffs on me," she begged.

Winthrop found her impudence amusing; and, with the charm of her novelty, he was conscious of a growing conviction that, somewhere, they had met before; that already at a crisis she had come into his life.

"I won't arrest you," he said with a puzzled smile, "on one condition."

"Ah!" mocked Vera; "he is generous."

"And the condition is," Winthrop went on seriously, "that you tell me where we met before?"

The girl's expression became instantly mask-like. To learn if he suspected where it was that they had met, she searched his face quickly. She was reassured that of the event he had no real recollection.

"That's rather difficult, isn't it," she continued lightly, "when you consider I've been giving exhibitions of mind-readings for the last six weeks on Broadway, and in the homes of people you probably know?"

"No," Winthrop exclaimed eagerly, "it wasn't in a theatre, and it wasn't in a private house. It was—" he shook his head helplessly, and looked at her for assistance. "You don't know, do you?"

The girl regarded him steadily. "How should I?" she said. And then, as though decided upon a course of action of the wisdom of which she was uncertain, she laughed uneasily.

"But the spirits would know," she said. "I might ask them."

"Do!" cried Winthrop, delightedly. "How much would that be?"

As though to reprove his flippancy, the girl frowned. With a nervous tremor, which this time seeemd genuine enough, she threw back her head, closed her eyes, and laid her arm across her forehead.

Winthrop, unobserved, watched her with a smile, partly of amusement, partly on account of her beauty, of admiration.

"I see—a court-room," said the girl. "It is very mean and bare. It is somewhere up the State; in a small town. Outside, there are trees, and the sun is shining, and people are walking in a public park. Inside, in the prisoner's dock, there is a girl. She has been arrested—for theft. She has pleaded guilty! And I see—that she has been very ill—that she is faint from shame—and fear—and lack of food. And there is a young lawyer. He is defending her; he is asking the judge to be merciful, because this is her first offence, because she stole the cloak to get money to take her where she had been promised work. Because this is his *first case.*

Winthrop gave a gasp of disbelief.

"You don't mean to tell me—" he cried.

"Hush!" commanded the girl. "And he per-

suades the judge to let her go," she continued quickly, her voice shaking, "and he and the girl walk out of the court-house together. And he talks to her kindly, and gives her money to pay her way to the people who have promised her work."

Vera dropped her arm, and stepping back, faced Winthrop. Through her tears her eyes were flashing proudly, gratefully; the feeling that shook her made her voice vibrate. The girl seemed proud of her tears, proud of her debt of gratitude.

"And I've never forgotten you," she said, her vioce eager and trembling, "and what you did for me. And I've watched you come to this city, and fight it, and fight it, until you made them put you where you are." She stopped to control her voice, and smiled at him. "And *that's* why I knew you were District Attorney," she said; "and please—" She fumbled in the mesh purse at her waist and taking a bill from it, threw it upon the table. "And please, there's the money I owe you, and—and—I thank you—and good-by." She turned and almost ran from him toward the door to the hall.

"Stop!" cried Winthrop.

Poised for flight, the girl halted, and looked back.

"When can I see you again?" said the man. The tone made it less a question than a command.

In a manner as determined as his own, the girl shook her head.

"No!" she said.

"I must!" returned the man.

Again the girl shook her head, definitely, finally.

"It won't help you in your work," she pleaded, "to come to see me."

"I must!" repeated Winthrop simply.

The eyes of the girl met his, appealingly, defiantly.

"You'll be sorry," said the girl.

Winthrop laughed an eager, boyish laugh. When he spoke the tenseness in his voice had gone. His tone was confident, bantering.

"Then I will not come to see you," he said.

Uncertain, puzzled, Vera looked at him in distress. She thought he was mocking her.

"No?" she questioned.

"I'll come to see Vera, the medium," he explained.

Vera frowned, and then, in happy embarrassment, smiled wistfully.

"Oh, well," she stammered; "of course, if you're coming to consult me professionally—my hours are from four to six."

"I'll be there," cried the District Attorney.

Vera leaned forward eagerly.

"What day will you come?" she demanded.

"What day!" exclaimed the young man indignantly. "Why, *this* day!"

Vera gave a guilty, frightened laugh.

"Oh, will you?" she exclaimed delightedly. She clasped her fingers in a gesture of dismay. "Oh, I *hope* you won't be sorry!" she cried.

For some moments the District Attorney of New York stood looking at the door through which she had disappeared.

PART II

THE home of the Vances was in Thirty-fifth Street, nearly opposite the Garrick Theatre. It was one of a row of old-fashioned brick houses with high steps. As the seeker after truth entered the front hall, he saw before him the stairs to the second story; on his right, the folding-doors of the "front parlor," and at the far end of the hall, a single door that led to what was, in the old days, before this row of houses had been converted into offices, the family dining-room. To Vera the Vances had given the use of this room as a "reception parlor." The visitor first entered the room on his right, from it passed through another pair of folding-doors to the reception parlor, and then, when his audience was at an end, departed by the single door to the hall, and so, to the street.

The reception parlor bore but little likeness to a cave of mystery. There were no shaded lights, no stuffed alligator, no Indian draperies, no black cat. On a table, in the centre, under a heavy and

hideous chandelier with bronze gas jets, was a green velvet cushion. On this nestled an innocent ball of crystal. Beside it lay the ivory knitting needle with which Vera pointed out, in the hand of the visitor, those lines that showed he would be twice married, was of an ambitious temperament, and would make a success upon the stage. In a corner stood a wooden cabinet that resembled a sentry box on wheels. It was from this, on certain evenings, before a select circle of spiritualists, that Vera projected the ghosts of the departed. Hanging inside the cabinet was a silver-gilt crown and a cloak of black velvet, lined with purple silk and covered in gold thread with signs of the zodiac.

Save that these stage properties illustrated the taste of Mabel Vance, the room was of no interest. It held a rubber plant, a red velvet rocking-chair, across the back of which Mrs. Vance had draped a Neapolitan scarf; an upright piano, upon which Emmanuel Day, or, as he was known to the cross-roads of Broadway and Forty-second Street, "Mannie" Day, provoked the most marvellous rag-time; an enlarged photograph in crayon, of Professor Vance, in a frock coat and lawn tie, a china bull-dog coquettishly decorated with a blue bow, and, on the mantel-piece, two tall

beer steins and a hand telephone. From the long windows one obtained a view of the iron shutters of the new department store in Thirty-fourth Street, and of a garden, just large enough to contain a sumach tree, a refrigerator, and the packing-case in which the piano had arrived.

After leaving Winthrop, without waiting for Vance, Vera had returned directly to the house in Thirty-fifth Street, and locked herself in her room. And although "Mannie" Day had already ushered two visitors into the front room, Vera had not yet come downstairs. In consequence, Mabel Vance was in possession of the reception parlor.

Mrs. Vance was plump, pink-and-blonde, credulous and vulgar, but at all times of the utmost good-humor. Her admiration for Vera was equalled only by her awe of her. On this particular afternoon, although it already was after five o'clock, Mrs. Vance still wore a short dressing sack, open at the throat, and heavy with somewhat soiled lace. But her blonde hair was freshly "marcelled," and her nails pink and shining. In the absence of Vera, she was making a surreptitious and guilty use of the telephone. From the fact that in her left hand she held the *Morning Telegraph* open at the "previous performances" of the horses, and that the page had been cruelly

lacerated by a hat pin, it was fair to suppose that whoever was at the other end of the wire, was tempting her with the closing odds at the races.

In her speculations, she was interrupted by "Mannie" Day, who entered softly through the door from the hall.

"Mannie" Day was a youth of twenty-four. It was his heart's desire to be a "Broadwayard." He wanted to know all of those, and to be known only by those, who moved between the giant pillars that New York threw into the sky to mark her progress North.

He knew the soiled White Way as the oldest inhabitant knows the single street of the village. He knew it from the Rathskellers underground, to the roof gardens in the sky; in his firmament the stars were the electric advertisements over Long Acre Square, his mother earth was asphalt, the breath of his nostrils gasolene, the *Telegraph* was his Bible. His grief was that no one in the Tenderloin would take him seriously; would believe him wicked, wise, predatory. They might love him, they might laugh with him, they might clamor for his company; in no flat that could boast a piano, was he not, on his entrance, greeted with a shout; but the real Knights of the Highway treated him always as the questioning, wide-

eyed child. In spite of his after-midnight pallor, in spite of his honorable scars of dissipation, it was his misfortune to be cursed with a smile that was a perpetual plea of "not guilty."

"What can you expect?" an outspoken friend, who made a living as a wireless wire-tapper, had once pointed out to him. "That smile of yours could open a safe. It could make a show girl give up money! It's an alibi for everything from overspeeding to murder."

Mannie, as he listened, flushed with mortification. From that moment he determined that his life should be devoted to giving the lie to that smile, to that outward and visible sign of kindness, good-will, and innate innocence. As yet, he had not succeeded.

He interrupted Mabel at the telephone to inquire the whereabouts of Vera. "There's two girls in there, now," he said; "waiting to have their fortunes doped."

"Let 'em wait!" exclaimed Mabel. "Vera's upstairs dressing." In her eyes was the baleful glare of the plunger. "What was that you give me in the third race?"

At the first touch of the ruling passion, what interest Mannie may have felt for the impatient visitors vanished.

"Not in the third," he corrected briskly. "Keene entry win the third."

Mabel appealed breathlessly to the telephone. "What price the Keene entry in the third?" She turned to Mannie with reproachful eyes. "Even money!" she complained.

"That's what I told you," retorted Mannie. He lowered his voice, and gazed apprehensively toward the front parlor. "If you want a really good thing," he whispered hoarsely, "ask Joe what Pompadour is in the fifth!"

Mabel laughed scornfully, disappointedly.

"Pompadour!" she mocked.

"That's right!" cried the expert. "That's the one daily hint from Paris to-day. Joe will give you thirty to one."

Upon the defenceless woman he turned the full force of his accursed smile. "Put five on for me, Mabel?" he begged.

With unexpected determination of character Mabel declared sharply that she would do nothing of the sort.

"Two, then?" entreated the boy.

"Where," demanded Mabel unfeelingly, "is the twenty you owe me now?"

The abruptness of this unsportsmanlike blow below the belt caused Mannie to wince.

"How do *I* know where it is?" he protested. "As long as you haven't got it, why do you care where it is?" He heard the door from the hall open and, turning, saw Vera. He appealed to her. "Vera," he cried, "you'll loan me two dollars? I stand to win sixty. I'll give you thirty."

Vera looked inquiringly at Mabel. "What is it, Mabel," she asked; "a hand book?"

Mrs. Vance nodded guiltily.

"Mannie!" exclaimed Vera gently but reproachfully, "I told you I wouldn't loan you any more money till you paid Mabel what you've borrowed."

"How can I pay Mabel what I borrowed," demanded Mannie, "if I can't borrow the money from you to pay her? Only *two* dollars, Vera!"

Vera nodded to Mabel.

Mabel, at the phone, called, "Two dollars on Pompadour—to—win—for Mannie Day," and rang off.

"That makes thirty for you," exclaimed Mannie enthusiastically, "and twenty I owe to Mabel, and that leaves me ten."

Mrs. Vance, no longer occupied in the whirlpool of speculation, for the first time observed that Vera had changed her matronly robe of black lace for a short white skirt and a white shirt

waist. She noted also that there was a change in Vera's face and manner. She gave an impression of nervous eagerness, of unrest. Her smile seemed more appealing, wistful, girlish. She looked like a child of fourteen.

But Mabel was concerned more especially with the robe of virgin white.

For the month, which was July, the costume was appropriate, but, in the opinion of Mabel, in no way suited to the priestess of the occult and the mysterious.

"Why, Vera!" exclaimed Mrs. Vance, "whatever have you got on? Ain't you going to receive visitors? There's ten dollars waiting in there now."

In sudden apprehension, Vera looked down at her spotless garments.

"Don't I look nice?" she begged.

"Of course you look nice, dearie," Mabel assured her, "but you don't look like no fortune-teller."

"If you want to know what you look like," said Mannie sternly, "you look like one of the waiter girls at Childs's—that's what you look like."

"And your crown!" exclaimed Mabel, "and your kimono. Ain't you going to wear your kimono?"

She hastened to the cabinet and produced the cloak of black velvet and spangles, and the silver-gilt crown.

"No, I am *not!*" declared Vera. She wore the frightened look of a mutinous child. "I—I look so—foolish in them!"

Such heresy caused Mannie to gasp aloud: "You look grand in them," he protested; "don't she, Mabel?"

"Sure she does," assented that lady.

"And your junk?" demanded Mannie, referring to the jade necklace and the gold-plated bracelets. His eyes opened in sympathy. "You haven't pawned them, have you?"

"Pawned them?" laughed Vera; "I couldn't get anything on them!" As the only masculine point of view available, she appealed to Mannie wistfully. "Don't you like me better this way, Mannie?" she begged.

But that critic protested violently.

"Not a bit like it," he cried. "Now, in the gold tiara and the spangled opera cloak," he differentiated, "you look like a picture postal card! You got Lotta Faust's blue skirt back to Levey's. But not in the white goods!" He shook his head sadly, firmly. "You look, now, like you was made up for a May-day picnic in the

Bronx, and they'd picked on you to be Queen of the May."

Mabel carried the much-admired opera cloak to Vera, and held it out, tempting her.

"You'll wear it, just to please me and Mannie, won't you, dearie?" she begged. Vera retreated before it as though it held the germs of contagion.

"I will not," she rebelled. "I hate it! When I have that on, I feel—mean. I feel as mean as though I were picking pennies out of a blind man's hat." Mannie roared with delight.

"Gee!" he shouted; "but that's a hot one."

"Besides," said Vera consciously, "I'm—I'm expecting some one."

The manner more than the words thrilled Mabel with the most joyful expectations.

She exclaimed excitedly. "A gentleman friend, Vera?" she asked.

That Vera shunned all young men had been to Mabel a source of wonder and of pride. Even when the young men were the friends of her husband and of herself, the preoccupied manner with which Vera received them did not provoke in Mabel any resentment. It rather increased her approbation. Although horrified at the recklessness of the girl, she had approved even when Vera rejected an offer of marriage from a wine agent.

Secretly, for a proper alliance for her, Mabel read the society columns in search of eligible, rich young men. Finding that they invariably married eligible, rich young women, she had lately determined that Vera's destiny must be an English duke.

Still if, as she hoped, Vera had chosen for herself, Mabel felt assured that the man would prove worthy, and a good match. A good match meant one who owned not only a runabout, but a touring car.

"It's a man from home," said Vera.

"Home?" queried Mannie.

"From up the State," explained Vera; "from Geneva. It's—Mr. Winthrop."

With an exclamation of alarm, Mannie started upright. "Winthrop!" he cried; then with a laugh of relief he sank back. "Gee! you give me a scare," he cried. "I thought you meant the District Attorney."

Mabel laughed sympathetically.

"I thought so too," she admitted.

"I *do* mean the District Attorney," said the girl.

"Vera!" cried Mabel.

"Winthrop—coming *here?*" demanded Mannie.

"I met him at Mr. Hallowell's this morning," said Vera. "Didn't Paul tell you?"

"Paul ain't back yet," said Mannie. "I wish he was!" His lower jaw dropped in dazed bewilderment. "Winthrop—coming *here?*" he repeated. "And they're all coming here!" he exclaimed excitedly. "Paul just phoned me. They've taken Gaylor in with them, and we're all working together now on some game for to-night. And Winthrop's coming *here!*" He shook his head decidedly, importantly. As the only man of the family present, he felt he must meet this crisis. "Paul won't stand for it!" he declared.

"Well, Paul will just have to stand for it!" retorted Mrs. Vance.

With a murmur of sympathy she crossed to Vera. "I'm not going to see our Vera disappointed," she announced. "She never sees no company. Vera, if Mr. Winthrop comes when that bunch is here, I'll show him into the front parlor."

Vera sat down in front of the piano and let her fingers drop upon the keys. The look of eagerness and anticipation had left her eyes.

"Oh, I don't know," she said, "that I want to see him—now."

With complete misunderstanding, Mannie de-

"I will not," she rebelled. "I hate it!"

manded truculently, "Why not?" His loyalty to Vera gave him courage, in her behalf, to face even a District Attorney. "He doesn't think he's coming here to make trouble for you, does he?"

Vera shook her head and, bending over the piano, struck a few detached chords.

"Oh, no," she said consciously; "just to see me—professionally—like everybody else."

Mabel could no longer withhold her indignation at the obtuseness of the masculine intellect.

"My gracious, Mannie!" she exclaimed, "can't you understand he's coming here to make a call on Vera—like a gentleman—not like no District Attorney."

Mannie precipitately retreated from his position as champion.

"Sure, I understand," he protested.

With the joy that a match-making mother takes in the hunt, Mabel sank into the plush rocking-chair and, rocking violently, turned upon Vera an eager and excited smile.

"Think of our Vera knowing Mr. Winthrop socially!" she exclaimed. "It's grand! And they say his sisters are elegant ladies. Last winter I read about them at the opera, and it always printed what they had on. Why didn't you tell

me you knowed him, Vera?" she cried reproachfully. "I tell *you* everything!"

"I don't know him," protested the girl. "I used to see him when he lived in the same town."

Mabel, inviting further confidences, ceased rocking and nodded encouragingly. "Up in Geneva?" she prompted.

"Yes," said Vera; "I used to see him every afternoon then, when he played ball on the college nine——"

"Who?" demanded Mannie incredulously.

"Winthrop," said Vera.

"Did he?" exclaimed Mannie. His tone suggested that he might still be persuaded that there was good in the man.

"What'd he play?" he demanded suspiciously.

"First," said Vera.

"Did he!" exclaimed Mannie. His tone now was of open approbation.

Vera had raised her eyes and turned them toward the windows. Beyond the soot-stained sumach tree, the fire-escapes of the department store, she saw the sun-drenched campus, the buttressed chapel, the ancient, drooping elms; and on a canvas bag, poised like a winged Mercury, a tall straight figure in gray, dusty flannels.

"He was awfully good-looking," murmured the

girl, "and awfully tall. He could stop a ball as high as—*that!*" She raised her arm in the air, and then, suddenly conscious, flushed, and turned to the piano.

"Go on, tell us," urged Mabel. "So you first met him in Geneva, did you?"

"No," corrected Vera; "*saw* him there. I—only *met* him once."

Mannie interrupted hilariously.

"*I* only saw him once, too," he cried; "that was enough for me."

Vera swiftly spun the piano stool, so that she faced him. Her eyes were filled with concern.

"You, Mannie!" she demanded anxiously. "What had you done?"

"Done!" exclaimed Mannie indignantly, "nothing! What'd you think I'd done? Did you think I was a crook?"

Vera bowed her shoulders and shivered as though the boy had cursed at her. She shook her head vehemently and again swung back to the piano. Stumbling awkwardly, her fingers ran over the keys in a swift clatter of broken chords. "No," she whispered; "no, Mannie; no."

With a laugh of delighted recollection, Mannie turned to Mabel.

"He raided a poolroom I was working at,"

he explained. "He picked me out as a sheet writer, because I had my coat off, see? I told him I had it off because it was too hot for me, and he says, 'Young man, if you lie to me, I'll make it a damn sight hotter!'" Mannie threw back his head and shouted uproariously. "He's all right, Winthrop!" he declared.

Mabel, having already married Winthrop to Vera in Grace Church, with herself in the front pew, in a blue silk dress, received this unexpected evidence of his rare wit with delight. In ecstasy of appreciation she slapped her knees.

"Did he say that, Mannie?" she cried. "Wasn't that quick of him! Did you hear what he said to Mannie, Vera?" she demanded.

Their mirth was interrupted by the opening and closing of the front door and, in the hall, the murmur of men's voices.

Vance opened the door from the hall and entered, followed by Judge Gaylor and Rainey. With evident pride in her appearance, Vance introduced the two men to his wife, and then sent her and Mannie from the room—the latter with orders to dismiss the visitors in the front parlor and to admit no others.

At the door Mrs. Vance turned to Vera and nodded mysteriously.

"If that party calls," she said with significance, "I'll put him in the front parlor." With a look of dismay, Vera vehemently shook her head but, to forestall any opposition, Mrs. Vance hastily slammed the door behind her.

In his most courteous manner Judge Gaylor offered the chair at the head of the centre table to Vera, and at the same table seated himself. Vance took a place on the piano stool; Rainey stood with his back to the mantel-piece.

"Miss Vera," Gaylor began impressively, "I desire to apologize for my language this morning. As Rainey no doubt has told you, I have opposed you and Professor Vance. But I—I know when I'm beaten. Your influence with Mr. Hallowell to-day—is greater than mine. It is paramount. I congratulate you." He smiled ingratiatingly. "And now," he added, "we are all working in unison."

"You've given up your idea of sending me to jail," said Vera.

"Vera!" exclaimed Vance reprovingly. "Judge Gaylor has apologized. We're all in harmony now."

"Is that door locked?" asked Gaylor. Vance told him, save Mrs. Vance, Mannie, and themselves, there was none in the house; and that he might speak freely.

"Miss Vera," began the Judge, "we left Mr. Hallowell very much impressed with the message you gave him this morning. The message from his dead sister. He wants another message from her. He wants her to decide how he shall dispose of a very large sum of money—his entire fortune."

"His entire fortune!" exclaimed Vera. "Do you imagine," she asked, "that Mr. Hallowell will take advice from the spirit-world about *that?* I don't!"

"I do," Gaylor answered stoutly; "I know *I* would."

"You?" asked Vera incredulously.

"If I could believe my sister came from the dead to tell me what to do," said the lawyer, "of course, I'd do it. I'd be afraid not to. But I don't believe. *He* does. And he believes you can bring his sister herself before him. He insists that to-night you hold a seance in his house, and that you materialize the spirit of his dead sister. So that he can see his sister, and talk with his sister. Vance says you can do that. Can you?"

From Vera's face the look of girlishness, of happy anticipation, had already disappeared.

"It is my business to do that," the girl an-

swered. She turned to Vance and, in a matter-of-fact voice, inquired, "What does his sister look like—that photograph we used this morning?"

"No," Vance answered. "I've a better one, Rainey gave me. Taken when she was older. Has white hair and a cap and a kerchief crossed —so." He drew his hands across his shoulders. "Rainey, show Miss Vera that picture."

"Not now," Gaylor commanded. "The important thing *now* is that Miss Vera understands the message Mr. Hallowell is to receive from his sister."

The two other men nodded quickly in assent. Gaylor turned to Vera. He spoke slowly, earnestly.

"Miss Vera," he said, "Mr. Hallowell's present will leaves his fortune to his niece. He has made *another* will, which he has not signed, leaving his fortune to the Hallowell Institute. He will ask his sister, to *which* of these he should leave his money. You will tell him—" He corrected himself instantly. "She will tell him to give it where it will be of the greatest good to the most people—to the Institute." There was a pause. "Do you understand?" he asked.

"To the Institute. Not to the niece," Vera answered. Gaylor nodded gravely.

"What," asked Vera, "are the fewest words in which that message could be delivered? I mean —should she say, 'You are to endow the Hallowell Institute,' or 'Brother, you are to give—' 'Sign the new will'?" With satisfaction the girl gave a sharp shake of her head, and nodded to Vance. "'Destroy the old will. Sign the new will.' That is the best," she said.

"That's it exactly," Gaylor exclaimed eagerly; "that's excellent!" Then his face clouded. "I think," he said in a troubled voice, "we should warn Miss Vera, that to guard himself from any trickery, Mr. Hallowell insists on subjecting her to the most severe tests. He——"

"That will be all right," said the girl. She turned to Vance and, in a lower tone but without interest, asked: "What, for instance?" Vance merely laughed and shrugged his shoulders. The girl smiled. Nettled, and alarmed at what appeared to be their overconfidence, Gaylor objected warmly.

"That's all very well," he cried, "but 'for instance,' he insists that the entire time you are in the cabinet, you hold a handful of flour in one hand and of shot in the other"—he illustrated with clenched fists—"which makes it impossible," he protested, "for you to use your hands."

The face of the girl showed complete indifference.

"Not necessarily," she said.

"But you are to be tied hand and foot," cried the Judge. "And on top of that," he burst forth indignantly, pointing aggrievedly at Vance, "he himself proposed this flour-and-shot test. It was silly, senseless bravado!"

"Not necessarily," repeated the girl. "He knew that I invented it." Rainey laughed. Gaylor gave an exclamation of enlightenment.

"If it will be of any comfort to you, Judge," said Vance, "I'll tell you one thing: every test that ever was put to a medium—was invented by a medium."

Vera rose. "If there is nothing more," she said, "I will go and get the things ready for this evening. 'Destroy the old will. Sign the new will,'" she repeated. She turned suddenly to Vance, her brow drawn in consideration. "I suppose by this new will," she asked, "the girl gets nothing?"

"Not at all!" exclaimed Gaylor emphatically. "We don't want her to *fight* the will. She gets a million."

"A million dollars?" demanded Vera. For an instant, as though trying to grasp the possibilities

of such a sum, she stood staring ahead of her. With doubt in her eyes, and shaking her head, she turned to Vance.

"How can one woman spend a million dollars?" she protested.

"Well, you see, we don't intend to starve her," exclaimed Gaylor eagerly, "and at the same time the Institute will be benefiting all humanity. Doing good to——"

Vera interrupted him with a sharp, peremptory movement of the hand.

"We won't go into that, please," she begged.

The Judge inclined his head. "I only meant to point out," he said stiffly, "that you are giving Mr. Hallowell the best advice, and doing great good."

For a moment the girl looked at him steadily. On her lips was a faint smile of disdain, but whether for him or for herself, the Judge could not determine.

"I don't know that," the girl said finally. "I don't ask." She turned to Rainey. "Have you that photograph?" He gave her a photograph and after, for an instant, studying it in silence, she returned it to him.

"It will be quite easy," she said to Vance. She walked to the door, and instinctively the two men, who were seated, rose.

"I will see you to-night at Mr. Hallowell's," she said and, with a nod, left them.

"Well," exclaimed Rainey, "you didn't tell her!"

"I know," Vance answered. "I decided we'd be wiser to take advice from my wife. She understands Vera better than I do." He opened the door to the hall, and called "Mannie! tell Mabel— Oh, Mabel," he corrected, "come here a minute." He returned to his seat on the piano stool. "She can tell us," he said.

In expectation of the arrival of Winthrop, Mrs. Vance had arrayed herself in a light-blue frock, and, as though she had just come in from the street, in such a hat as she considered would do credit not only to Vera but to herself.

"Mabel," her husband began, "we're up against a hard proposition. Hallowell insists that Winthrop and Miss Coates must come to the seance to-night."

"Winthrop and Miss Coates!" cried Mabel. In astonishment she glanced from her husband to Rainey and Gaylor. "Then, it's all off!" she exclaimed.

"That's what I say," growled Rainey.

"We want you to tell us," continued Vance, unmoved, "whether Vera should know that now, or wait until to-night?"

"Paul Vance!" almost shrieked his wife: "do you mean to tell me you're thinking of giving a materialization in front of the District Attorney! You're crazy!"

"That's what I tell them," chorused Rainey.

Gaylor raised his hand for silence.

"No, Mrs. Vance," he said wearily. "We are not crazy, but," he added bitterly, "we can't help ourselves. You mediums have got Mr. Hallowell in such a state that he'll only do what his sister's spirit tells him. He says, if he's robbing his niece, his sister will tell him so; if he's to give the money to the Institute, his sister will tell him that. He says, if Vance is fair and aboveboard, he shouldn't be afraid to have his niece and any friends of hers present. We can't help ourselves."

"I helped a little," said Vance, "by insisting on having our own friends there—told him the spirit could not materialize unless there were believers present."

"Did he stand for that?" asked Mabel.

"Glad to have them," her husband assured her. "They like to think there are others as foolish as they are. And I'm going to place Mr. District Attorney," he broke out suddenly and fiercely, "between two mediums. They'll hold his hands!"

Already frightened by the possible result of the plot, Rainey, with a vehemence born of fear, retorted sharply: "Hold his hands! How're you going to make him hold his tongue, afterward?"

Gaylor turned upon him savagely.

"My God, man!" he cried, "we're not trying to persuade the District Attorney that he's seen a ghost. If your friends can persuade Stephen Hallowell that *he's* seen one, the District Attorney can go to the devil!"

"Well, he won't!" returned Rainey; "he'll go to law!"

"Let him!" cried Gaylor defiantly. "Get Hallowell to sign that will, and *I'll* go into court with him."

His bravado was suddenly attacked from an unexpected source.

"You'll go into court with him, all right," declared Mrs. Vance, "all of you! And if you don't want him to catch you," she cried, "you'll clear out, now! He's coming here any minute."

"Who's coming here?" demanded her husband.

"Winthrop," returned his wife; "to see Vera."

"To see Vera!" cried Vance eagerly. "What about? About this morning?"

"No," protested Mabel; "to call on her. He's an old friend——"

In alarm Rainey pushed into the group of now thoroughly excited people. "Don't you believe it!" he cried. "If he's coming here, he's coming to give her the third degree——"

The door from the hall suddenly opened, was as suddenly closed, and Mannie slipped into the room. One hand he held up for silence; with the other he pointed at the folding doors.

"Hush!" he warned them. "He's in there! He says, he's come to call on Vera. She says, he's come professionally, and I must bring him in here. I've shut the door into the parlor, and you can slip upstairs without his seeing you."

"Upstairs!" gasped Rainey; "not for me!" He appealed to Gaylor in accents of real alarm. "We must get away from this house," he declared. "If he finds *us* here—" With a gesture of dismay he tossed his hands in the air. Gaylor nodded. In silence all, save Mannie, moved into the hall, and halted between the outer and inner doors of the vestibule. Gaylor turned to Vance. "Are you going to tell her," he asked, "that he is to be there to-night?"

"He'll tell her himself, now!"

"No," corrected Rainey; "he doesn't know yet there's to be a seance. Hallowell was writing the note when he left."

"Then," instructed Gaylor, "do not let her know until she arrives—until it will be too late for her to back out."

Vance nodded and, waiting until from the back room he heard the voices of Mannie and Winthrop, he opened the front door and the two men ran down the steps into the street.

While the conspirators were hidden in the vestibule, Mannie had opened the folding doors, and invited Winthrop to enter the reception parlor.

"Miss Vera will be down in a minute," he said. "If you want your hand read," he added, pointing, "you sit over there."

As Winthrop approached the centre table, Mannie backed against the piano. The presence of the District Attorney at such short range aroused in him many emotions. Alternately he was torn with alarm, with admiration, with curiosity. He regarded him apprehensively, with a nervous and unhappy smile.

About the smile there was something that Winthrop found familiar, and, with one almost as attractive, he answered it.

"I think we've met before, haven't we?" he asked pleasantly.

Mannie nodded. "Yes, sir," he answered

promptly. "At Sam Hepner's old place, on West Forty-fourth Street."

"Why, of course!" exclaimed the District Attorney.

"Don't you—don't you remember?" stammered Mannie eagerly. He was deeply concerned lest the distinguished cross-examiner should think, that from him of his lurid past he could withhold anything. "I had my coat off—and *you* said you'd make it hot for me."

"Did I?" asked Winthrop with an effort at recollection.

"No, you didn't!" Mannie hastened to reassure him. "I mean, you didn't make it hot for me."

Winthrop laughed, and seated himself comfortably beside the centre table. "Well I'm glad of that," he said. "So our relations are still pleasant, then?" he asked.

"Sure!" exclaimed Mannie heartily. "I mean —yes, sir."

Winthrop mechanically reached for his cigarette case, and then, recollecting, withdrew his hand.

"And how are the ponies running?" he asked.

The interview was filling Mannie with excitement and delight. He chuckled with pleasure. His fear of the great man was rapidly departing. Could this, he asked himself, be the "terror to

evil-doers," the man whose cruel questions drove witnesses to tears, whose "third degree" sent veterans of the under-world staggering from his confessional box, limp and gasping?

"Oh, pretty well," said the boy; "seems as if I couldn't keep away from them. I got a good thing for to-day—Pompadour—in the fifth. I put all the money on her I could get together," he announced importantly, and then added frankly, with a laugh, "two dollars!" The laugh was contagious, and the District Attorney laughed with him.

"Pompadour," Winthrop objected; "she's one of those winter-track favorites."

"I know; but to-day," declared Mannie, "she win, sure!" Carried away by his enthusiasm, and by the sympathy of his audience, he rushed, unheeding, to his fate. "If you'd like to put a little on," he said, "I can tell you where you can do it."

The District Attorney stared and laughed. "You mustn't tell *me* where you can do it," he said.

Mannie gave a terrified gasp and, for an instant, clapped his hands over his lips. "That's right," he cried. "Gee, that's right! I'm such a crank on all kinds of sport that I clean forgot!"

He gazed at the much-dreaded District Attorney with the awe of the new-born hero-worshipper. "I guess you are, too, hey?" he protested admiringly. "Vera was telling me you used to be a great ball tosser."

In the face of the District Attorney there came a sudden interest. His eyes lightened.

"How did she——"

"She used to watch you in Geneva," said Mannie; "playing with the college lads. I—I," he added consciously, "was a ball player myself once. Used to pitch for the Interstate League." He stopped abruptly.

"Interstate?" said Winthrop encouragingly. "You must have been good."

The enthusiasm had departed from the face of the boy. "Yes," he said, "but—" he smiled shamefacedly, "but I got taking coke, and they—" He finished with a dramatic gesture of the hand as of a man tossing away a cigarette.

"Cocaine?" said the District Attorney.

The boy nodded and, for an instant, the two men eyed each other, the boy smiling ruefully. The District Attorney shook his head. "My young friend," he said, "you can never beat *that* game!"

Mannie stared at him, his eyes filled with surprise.

"Don't you suppose," he said simply, "that I know that better than you do?" With a boy's pride in his own incorrigibility he went on boastingly: "Oh, yes," he said, "I used to be awful bad! Cocaine and all kinds of dope, and cigarettes, and whiskey. I was nearly all in—with morphine, it was then—till she took hold of me, and stopped me."

"She?" said Winthrop.

"Vera," said Mannie. "*She* made me stop. I *had* to stop. She started taking it herself."

"What!" cried Winthrop.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mannie hastily, "I don't mean what you mean—I mean she started taking it to make *me* stop. She says to me, 'Mannie, you're killing yourself, and you got to quit it; and if you don't, every time you take a grain, I'll take two.' And she did! I'd come home, and she'd see what I'd been doing, and she'd up with her sleeves, and—" In horrible pantomime, the boy lifted the cuff of his shirt, and pressed his right thumb against the wrist of his other arm. At the memory of it, he gave a shiver and, with a blow, roughly struck the cuff into place. "God!" he muttered. "I couldn't stand it. I begged, and begged her not. I cried. I used to get down, in this room, on my knees. And each time she'd

get whiter, and black under the eyes. And—and I *had* to stop. Didn't I?"

Winthrop moved his head.

"And now," cried the boy with a happy laugh, "I'm all right!" He appealed to the older man eagerly, wistfully. "Don't you think I'm looking better than I did the last time you saw me?"

Again, without venturing to speak, Winthrop nodded.

Mannie smiled with pride. "Everybody tells me so," he said. "Well, *she* did it. That's what she did for me. And, I can tell you," he said simply, sincerely, "there ain't anything I wouldn't do for her. I guess that's right, hey?" he added.

The eyes of the cruel cross-examiner, veiled under half-closed lids, were regarding the boy with so curious an expression that under their scrutiny Mannie, in embarrassment, moved uneasily. "I guess that's right," he repeated.

To his surprise, the District Attorney rose from his comfortable position and, leaning across the table, held out his hand. Mannie took it awkwardly.

"That's all right," he said.

"Sure, it's all right," said the District Attorney.

From the hall there was the sound of light, quick steps, and Mannie, happy to escape from a situation he did not understand, ran to the door.

"She's coming," he said. He opened the door and, as Vera entered, he slipped past her and closed it behind him.

Vera walked directly to the chair at the top of the centre table. She was nervous, and she was conscious that that fact was evident. To avoid shaking hands with her visitor, she carried her own clasped in front of her, with the fingers interlaced. She tried to speak in her usual suave, professional tone. "How do you do?" she said.

But Winthrop would not be denied. With a smile that showed his pleasure at again seeing her, he advanced eagerly, with his hand outstretched. "How are *you?*" he exclaimed. "Aren't you going to shake hands with me?" he demanded. "With an old friend?"

Vera gave him her hand quickly, and then, seating herself at the table, picked up the ivory pointer.

"I didn't know you were coming as an old friend," she murmured embarrassedly. "You said you were coming to consult Vera, the medium."

"But *you* said that was the only way I could

come," protested Winthrop. "Don't you remember, you said——"

Vera interrupted him. She spoke distantly, formally. "What kind of a reading do you want?" she asked. "A hand reading, or a crystal reading?"

Winthrop leaned forward in his chair, frankly smiling at her. He made no attempt to conceal the pleasure the sight of her gave him. His manner was that of a very old and dear friend, who, for the first time, had met her after a separation of years.

"Don't want any kind of a reading," he declared. "I want a talking. You don't seem to understand," he objected, "that I am making an afternoon call." His good-humor was unassailable. Looking up with a perplexed frown, Vera met his eyes and saw that he was laughing at her. She threw the ivory pointer down and, leaning back in her chair, smiled at him.

"I don't believe," she said doubtfully, "that I know much about afternoon calls. What would I do, if we were on Fifth Avenue? Would I give you tea?" she asked; "because," she added hastily, "there isn't any tea."

"In that case, it is not etiquette to offer any," said Winthrop gravely.

"Then," said Vera, "I'm doing it right, so far?"

They both laughed; Vera because she still was in awe of him, and Winthrop because he was happy.

"You're doing it charmingly," Winthrop assured her.

"Good!" exclaimed Vera. "Well, now," she inquired, "now we talk, don't we?"

"Yes," assented Winthrop promptly, "we talk about you."

"No, I—I don't think we do," declared Vera, in haste. "I think we talk about—Geneva." She turned to him with real interest. "Is the town much changed?" she asked.

As though preparing for a long talk, Winthrop dropped his hat to the floor and settled himself comfortably. "Well, it is, and it isn't," he answered. "Haven't you been back lately?" he asked.

Vera looked quickly away from him.

"I have never been back!" she answered. There was a pause and when she again turned her eyes to his, she was smiling. "But I always take the Geneva *Times*," she said, "and I often read that you've been there. You're a great man in Geneva."

Winthrop nodded gravely.

"Whenever I want to be a great man," he said, "I go to Geneva."

"Why, yes," exclaimed Vera. "Last June you delivered the oration to the graduating class," she laughed, "on 'The College Man in Politics.' Such an original subject! And did you point to yourself?" she asked mockingly, "as the—the bright example?"

"No," protested Winthrop, "I knew they'd see that."

Much to her relief, Vera found that of Winthrop she was no longer afraid.

"Oh!" she protested, "didn't you say, 'twelve years ago, a humble boy played ball for Hobart College. That boy now stands before you'? Didn't you say that?"

"Something like that," assented the District Attorney. "Oh!" he exclaimed, "that young man who showed me in here—your confederate or fellow-conspirator or lookout man or whatever he is—told me you used to be a regular attendant at those games."

"I never missed one!" Vera cried. She leaned forward, her eyes shining, her brows knit with the effort of recollection.

"I used to tell aunt," she said, "I had to drive in for the mail. But that was only an excuse.

Aunt had an old buggy, and an old white horse called Roscoe Conkling. I called him 'Rocks.' He was blind in one eye, and he would walk on the wrong side of the road; you had to drive him on one rein." The girl was speaking rapidly, eagerly. She had lost all fear of her visitor. With satisfaction Winthrop recognized this; and unconsciously he was now frankly regarding the face of the girl with a smile of pleasure and admiration.

"And I used to tie him to the fence just opposite first base," Vera went on excitedly, "and shout—for you!"

"Don't tell me," interrupted Winthrop, in burlesque excitement, "that you were that very pretty little girl, with short dresses and long legs, who used to sit on the top rail and kick and cheer."

Vera shook her head sternly.

"I was," she said; "but *you* never saw me."

"Oh, yes, we did," protested Winthrop. "We used to call you our mascot."

"No; that was some other little girl," said Vera firmly. "You never looked at *me*, and I"—she laughed, and then frowned at him reproachfully—"I thought you were—magnificent! I used to have your pictures in base-ball clothes pinned

all around my looking-glass, and whenever you made a base hit, I'd shout and shout—and you'd never look at me! And one day—" she stopped, and as though appalled by the memory, clasped her hands. "Oh, it was awful!" she exclaimed; "one day a foul ball hit the fence, and I jumped down and threw it to you, and *you* said, 'Thank you, sis!' And I," she cried, "thought I was a young lady!"

"Oh! I couldn't have said that," protested Winthrop; "maybe I said, 'sister.'"

"No," declared Vera, energetically shaking her head, "not 'sister,' 'sis.' And you never *did* look at me; and I used to drive past your house every day. We lived only a mile below you."

"Where?" asked Winthrop.

"On the lake road from Syracuse," said Vera. "Don't you remember the farm a mile below yours—the one with the red barn right on the road? Yes, you do," she insisted; "the cows were always looking over the fence right into the road."

"Of course!" exclaimed Winthrop delightedly. "Was that your house?"

"Oh, no," protested Vera; "ours was the little cottage on the other side——"

"With poplars round it?" demanded Winthrop.

"That's it!" cried Vera triumphantly; "with poplars round it."

"Why, I know that house well. We boys used to call it the haunted house."

"That's the one," assented Vera. She smiled with satisfaction. "Well, that's where I lived until aunt died," she said.

"And then, what?" asked Winthrop.

For a moment the girl did not answer. Her face had grown grave and she sat motionless, staring beyond her. Suddenly, as though casting her thoughts from her, she gave a sharp toss of her head.

"Then," she said, speaking quickly; "I went into the mills, and was ill there, and I wrote Paul and Mabel to ask if I could join them, and they said I could. But I was too ill, and I had no money—nothing. And then," she raised her eyes to his and regarded him steadily; "then I stole that cloak to get the money to join them, and you —you helped me to get away, and—and——"

Winthrop broke in hastily. He disregarded both her manner and the nature of what she had said.

"And how did you come to know the Vances?" he asked.

After a pause of an instant, the girl accepted

the cue his manner gave her, and answered as before.

"Through my aunt," she said. "*She* was a medium too."

"Of course!" cried Winthrop. "I remember now. *That's* why we called it the haunted house."

"My aunt," said the girl, regarding him steadily and with, in her manner, a certain defiance, "was a *great* medium. All the spiritualists in that part of the State used to meet at our house. I've witnessed some wonderful manifestations in that front parlor." She turned to Winthrop and smiled. "So, you see," she exclaimed, "I was born and brought up in this business. I am the seventh daughter of a seventh daughter. My grandmother was a medium, my mother was a medium—she worked with the Fox sisters before they were exposed. But, my aunt," she added thoughtfully, judicially, "was the greatest medium I have ever seen. She did certain things *I* couldn't understand, and I know every trick in the trade—unless," she explained, "you believe the spirits helped her."

Winthrop was observing the girl intently, with a new interest.

"And you don't believe that?" he asked, quietly.

"How can I?" Vera said. "I was brought up with them." She shook her head and smiled. "I used to play around the kitchen stove with Pocahontas and Alexander the Great, and Martin Luther lived in our china closet. You see, the neighbors wouldn't let their children come to our house; so, the only playmates I had were—ghosts." She laughed wistfully. "My!" she exclaimed, "I was a queer, lonely little rat. I used to hear voices and see visions. I do still," she added. With her elbows on the arms of her chair, she clasped her hands under her chin and leaned forward. She turned her eyes to Winthrop and nodded confidentially.

"Do you know," she said, "sometimes I think people from the other world *do* speak to me."

"But you said," Winthrop objected, "you didn't believe."

"I know," returned Vera. "I can't!" Her voice was perplexed, impatient. "Why, I can sit in this chair," she declared earnestly, "and fill this room with spirit voices and rappings, and you sitting right there can't see how I do it. And yet, in *spite* of all the tricks, sometimes I believe there's something in it."

She looked at Winthrop, her eyes open with inquiry. He shook his head.

"Yes," insisted the girl. "When these women come to me for advice, I don't invent what I say to them. It's as though something told me what to say. I have never met them before, but as soon as I pass into the trance state I seem to know all their troubles. And I seem to be half in this world and half in another world—carrying messages between them. Maybe," her voice had sunk to almost a whisper; she continued as though speaking to herself, "I only *think* that. I don't know. I wonder."

There was a long pause.

"I wish," began Winthrop earnestly, "I wish you were younger, or I were older."

"Why?" asked Vera.

"Because," said the young man, "I'd like to talk to you—like a father."

Vera turned and smiled on him securely, with frank friendliness. "Go ahead," she assented; "talk to me like a father."

Winthrop smiled back at her, and then frowned. "You shouldn't be in this business," he said.

The girl regarded him steadily.

"What's the matter with the business?" she asked.

Winthrop felt she had put him upon the defensive, but he did not hesitate.

"Well," he said, "there *may* be some truth in it. But we don't know that. We do know that there's a lot of fraud and deceit in it. Now," he declared warmly, "there's nothing deceitful about you. You're fine," he cried enthusiastically, "you're big! That boy who was in here told me one story about you, that showed——"

Vera stopped him sharply.

"What do you know of me?" she asked bitterly. "The first time you ever saw me I was in a police court; and this morning—you heard that man threaten to put me in jail——"

In turn, by abruptly rising from his chair, Winthrop interrupted her. He pushed the chair out of his way, and, shoving his hands into his trousers' pockets, began pacing with long, quick strides up and down the room. "What do I care for that?" he cried contemptuously. He tossed the words at her over his shoulder. "I put lots of people in jail myself that are better than I am. Only, they won't play the game." He halted, and turned on her. "Now, you're not playing the game. This is a mean business; taking money from silly girls and old men. You're too good for that." He halted at the table and stood facing her. "I've got two sisters uptown," he said. He spoke commandingly, peremptorily. "And

to-morrow I am going to take you to see them. And we fellow townsmen," he smiled at her appealingly, "will talk this over, and we'll make you come back to your own people."

For a moment the two regarded each other. Then the girl answered firmly, but with a slight hoarseness in her voice, and in a tone hardly louder than a whisper:

"You know I can't do that!"

"I don't!" blustered Winthrop. "Why not?"

"Because," said the girl steadily, "of what I did in Geneva."

As though the answer was the one he had feared, the man exclaimed sharply, rebelliously.

"Nonsense!" he cried. "You didn't know what you were doing. No decent person would consider that."

"They do," said the girl, "they are the very ones who do. And—it's been in the papers. Everybody in Geneva knows it. And here too. And whenever I try to get away from this"—she stretched out her hands to include the room about her—"*some one tells!* Five times, now." She leaned forward appealingly, not as though asking pity for herself, but as wishing him to see her point of view. "I didn't choose this business," she protested, "I was sort of born in it, and," she

broke out loyally, "I hate to have you call it a mean business; but I can't get into any other. Whenever I have, some man says, 'That girl in your front office is a thief.'" The restraint she put upon herself, the air of disdain which at all times she had found the most convenient defence, fell from her.

"It's not fair!" she cried; "it's not fair." To her mortification, the tears of self-pity sprang to her eyes, and as she fiercely tried to brush them away, to her greater anger, continued to creep down her cheeks. "It was nine years ago," she protested; "I was a child. I've been punished enough." She raised her face frankly to his, speaking swiftly, bitterly.

"Of course, I want to get away!" she cried. "Of course, I want friends. I've never had a friend. I've *always* been alone. I'm tired, tired! I hate this business. I never know how much I hate it until the chance comes to get away—and I can't."

She stopped, but without lowering her head or moving her eyes from his.

"This time," said the man quietly, "you're going to get away from it."

"I can't," repeated the girl. "*You* can't help me!"

Winthrop smiled at her confidently.

"I'm going to try," he said.

"No, please!" begged the girl. Her voice was still shaken with tears. She motioned with her head toward the room behind her.

"These are my people," she declared defiantly, as though daring him to contradict her. "And they are good people! They've tried to be good friends to me; and they've been true to me."

Winthrop came toward her and stood beside her; so close that he could have placed his hand upon her shoulder. He wondered, whimsically, if she knew how cruel she seemed in appealing with her tears, her helplessness and loveliness to what was generous and chivalric in him; and, at the same time, by her words, treating him as an interloper and an enemy.

"That's all right," he said gently. "But that doesn't prevent my being a good friend to you, too, does it? Or," he added, his voice growing tense and conscious—"my being true to you? My sisters will be here to-morrow," he announced briskly.

Vera had wearily dropped her arms upon the table and lowered her head upon them. From a place down in the depths she murmured a protest.

"No," contradicted Winthrop cheerfully, "this time you are going to win. You'll have back of you, if I do say it, two of the best women God ever made. Only, now, you must do as I say." There was a pause. "Will you?" he begged.

Vera raised her head slowly, holding her hand across her eyes. There was a longer silence, and then she looked up at him and smiled pathetically, gratefully, and nodded.

"Good!" cried Winthrop. "No more spooks," he laughed; "no more spirit rappings."

Through her tears Vera smiled up at him a wan, broken smile. She gave a shudder of distaste. "Never!" she whispered. "I promise." Their eyes met; the girl's looking into his shyly, gratefully; the man's searching hers eagerly. And suddenly they saw each other with a new and wonderful sympathy and understanding. Winthrop felt himself bending toward her. He was conscious that the room had grown dark, and that he could see only her eyes. "You must be just yourself," he commanded, but so gently, so tenderly, that, though he did not know it, each word carried with it the touch of a caress, "just your sweet, fine, noble self!"

Something he read in the girl's uplifted eyes made him draw back with a shock of wonder, of

delight, with an upbraiding conscience. To pull himself together, he glanced quickly about him. The day had really grown dark. He felt a sudden desire to get away; to go where he could ask himself what had happened, what it was that had filled this unknown, tawdry room with beauty and given it the happiness of a home.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed nervously, "I had no idea I'd stayed so long. You'll not let me come again. Good-by—until to-morrow." He turned, holding out his hand, and found that again the girl had dropped her face upon her arm, and was sobbing quietly, gently.

"Oh, what is it?" cried Winthrop. "What have I said?" The catch in the girl's voice as she tried to check the sobs wrenched his heart. "Oh, please," he begged; "I've said something wrong? I've hurt you?" With her face still hidden in her arms, the girl shook her head.

"No, no!" she sobbed. Her voice, soft with tears, was a melody of sweet and tender tones. "It's only—that I've been so lonely—and you've made me happy, happy!"

The sobs broke out afresh, but Winthrop, now knowing that they brought to the girl peace, was no longer filled with dismay.

Suddenly they saw each other with a new and wonderful sympathy

Her head was bent upon her left arm, her right hand lightly clasped the edge of the table. With the intention of saying farewell, Winthrop took her hand in his. The girl did not move. To his presence she seemed utterly oblivious. In the gathering dusk he could see the bent figure, could hear the soft, irregular breathing as the girl wept gently, happily; like a child sobbing itself to sleep. The hand he held in his neither repelled nor invited, and for an instant he stood motionless, holding it uncertainly. It was so delicate, so helpless, so appealing, so altogether lovable. It seemed to reach up, and, with warm, clinging fingers, clutch the tendrils of his heart.

Winthrop bent his head suddenly, and lifting the hand, kissed it; and then, without again speaking, walked quickly into the hall and shut the door. In the room the dusk deepened. Through the open windows came the roar of the Sixth Avenue Elevated, the insistent clamor of an electric hansom, the murmur of Broadway at night. The tears had suddenly ceased, but the girl had not moved. At last, slowly, stiffly, she raised her head. Her eyes, filled with wonder, with amazement, were fixed upon her hand. She glanced cautiously about her. Assured she was alone, with her other hand she lifted the one

Winthrop had kissed and held it pressed against her lips.

The folding doors were thrown open, letting in a flood of light, and Mabel Vance, entering swiftly, knelt at the table and bent her head close to Vera.

"That woman's in the hall," she whispered, "that niece of Hallowell's. Paul and Mannie can't get rid of her. Now she's got hold of Winthrop. She says she *will* see you. Be careful!"

Vera rose. That Mabel might not see she had been weeping, she walked to the piano, covertly drying her eyes.

"What," she asked dully, "does she want with me?"

"About to-night," answered Mabel. She exclaimed fiercely, "I told them there'd be trouble!"

With Vance upon her heels, Helen Coates came in quickly from the hall. Her face was flushed, her eyes lit with indignation and excitement. In her hand she held an open letter.

As though to protect Vera, both Vance and his wife moved between her and their visitor, but, disregarding them, Miss Coates at once singled out the girl as her opponent.

"You are the young woman they call Vera, I believe," she said. "I have a note here from Mr.

Hallowell telling me you are giving a seance to-night at his house. That you propose to exhibit the spirit of my mother. That is an insult to the memory of my mother and to me. And I warn you, if you attempt such a thing, I will prevent it."

There was a pause. When Vera spoke it was in the tone of every-day politeness. Her voice was even and steady.

"You have been misinformed," she said. "There will be no seance to-night."

Vance turned to Vera, and, in a voice lower than her own, but sufficiently loud to include Miss Coates, said: "I don't think we told you that Mr. Hallowell himself *insists* that this lady and her friends be present."

"Her presence makes no difference," said Vera quietly. "There will be no seance to-night. I will tell you about it later, Paul," she added. She started toward the door, but Miss Coates moved as though to intercept her.

"If you think," she cried eagerly, "you can give a seance to Mr. Hallowell without my knowing it, you are mistaken."

Vera paused, and made a slight inclination of her head.

"That was not my idea," she said. She looked

appealingly to Vance. "Is that not enough, Paul?" she asked.

"Quite enough!" exclaimed the man. He turned to the visitor and made a curt movement of the hand toward the open door.

"There *will* be a seance to-night," he declared. "*At* Mr. Hallowell's. If you wish to protest against it, you can do so there. This is my house. If you have finished—" He repeated the gesture toward the open door.

"I have not finished," said Miss Coates sharply; "and if you take my advice, you will follow *her* example." With a nod of the head she signified Vera. "When she sees she's in danger, she knows enough to stop. This is not a question of a few medium's tricks," she cried, contemptuously. "I know *all* that you planned to do, and I intend that to-morrow every one in New York shall know it too."

Like a cloak Vera's self-possession fell from her. In alarm she moved forward.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

"I have had you people followed pretty closely," said Miss Coates. Her tone was assured. She was confident that of those before her she was the master, and that of that fact they were aware.

"I know," she went on, "just how you tried to impose upon my uncle—how you tried to rob *me*, and to-night I have invited the reporters to my house to give them the facts."

With a cry Vera ran to her.

"No!" she begged, "you won't do that. You must not do that!"

"Let her talk!" growled Vance. "Let her talk! She's funny."

"No!" commanded Vera. Her voice rang with the distress. "She cannot do that!" She turned to Miss Coates. "We haven't hurt you," she pleaded; "we haven't taken your money. I promise you," she cried, "we will never see Mr. Hallowell again. I beg of you——"

Vance indignantly caught her by the arm and drew her back. "You don't beg nothing of her!" he cried.

"I do," Vera answered wildly. She caught Vance's hand in both of hers. "I have a chance, Paul," she entreated; "don't force me through it again. I can't stand the shame of it again." Once more she appealed to the visitor. "Don't!" she begged. "Don't shame me."

But the eyes of the older girl, blind to everything save what, as she saw it, was her duty, showed no consideration.

Vera's hands, trembling on his arm, drove Vance to deeper anger. He turned savagely upon Miss Coates.

"You haven't lost anything yet, have you?" he demanded. "She hasn't hurt you, has she? If it's revenge you want," he cried insolently, "why don't you throw vitriol on the girl?"

"Revenge!" exclaimed Miss Coates indignantly. "It is my duty. My public duty. I'm not alone in this; I am acting with the District Attorney. It is our duty." She turned suddenly and called, "Mr. Winthrop, Mr. Winthrop!"

For the first time Vera saw, under the gas jet, at the farther end of the hall, the figures of Mannie and Winthrop.

"No, no!" she protested; "I beg of you," she cried hysterically; "I've got a chance. If you print this thing to-morrow, I'll never have a chance again. Don't take it away from me." Impulsively her arms reached out in an eager final appeal. "I'm down," she said simply, "give me a chance to get up."

When Miss Coates came to give battle to the Vances, she foresaw the interview might be unpleasant. It was proving even more unpleasant than she had expected, but her duty seemed none the less obvious.

"You should have thought of that," she said, "before you were found out."

For an instant Vera stood motionless, staring, unconsciously holding the attitude of appeal. But when, by these last words, she recognized that her humiliation could go no further, with an inarticulate exclamation she turned away.

"The public has the right to know," declared Miss Coates, "the sort of people you are. I have the record of each of you——"

From the hall Winthrop had entered quickly, but, disregarding him, Vance broke in upon the speaker, savagely, defiantly.

"Print 'em, then!" he shouted; "print 'em!"

"I mean to," declared Miss Coates; "yours, and hers, she——"

Winthrop placed himself in front of her, shutting her off from the others. He spoke in an earnest whisper.

"Don't!" he begged. "She has asked for a chance. Give her a chance."

Miss Coates scorned to speak in whispers.

"She has had a chance," she protested loudly. "She's had a chance for nine years; and she's *chosen* to be a charlatan and a cheat, and—" The angry woman hesitated, and then flung the word—"and a thief!"

In the silence that followed no one turned toward Vera; but as it continued unbroken each raised his eyes and looked at her.

They saw her drawn to her full height; the color flown from her face, her deep, brooding eyes flashing. She was like one by some religious fervor lifted out of herself, exalted. When she spoke her voice was low, tense. It vibrated with tremendous, wondering indignation.

"Do you know *who* I am?" she asked. She spoke like one in a trance. "Do you know *who* you are threatening with your police and your laws? I am a priestess! I am a medium between the souls of this world and the next. I am Vera—the Truth! And I mean," the girl cried suddenly, harshly, flinging out her arm, "that you shall hear the truth! To-night I will bring your mother from the grave to speak it to you!"

With a swift, sweeping gesture she pointed to the door. "Take those people away!" she cried.

The eyes of Winthrop were filled with pity. "Vera!" he said, "Vera!"

For an instant, against the tenderness and reproach in his voice the girl held herself motionless; and then, falling upon the shoulder of Mrs. Vance, burst into girlish, heart-broken tears.

"Take them away," she sobbed; "take them away!"

Mannie Day and Vance closed in upon the visitors, and motioning them before them, drove them from the room.

PART III

THE departure of the District Attorney and Miss Coates left Vera free to consider how serious, if she carried out her threat, the consequences might be. But of this chance she did not avail herself. Instead, with nervous zeal she began to prepare for her masquerade. It was as though her promise to Winthrop to abandon her old friends had filled her with remorse, and that she now, by an extravagance of loyalty, was endeavoring to make amends.

At nine o'clock, with the Vances, she arrived at the house of Mr. Hallowell. Already, to the same place, a wagon had carried the cabinet, a parlor organ, and a dozen of those camp-chairs that are associated with house weddings and funerals; and while, in the library, Vance and Mannie arranged these to their liking, on the third floor Vera, with Mrs. Vance, waited for that moment to arrive when Vance considered her entrance would be the most effective.

This entrance was to be made through the doorway that opened from the hall on the second

story into the library. To the right of this door, in an angle of two walls, was the cabinet, and on the left, the first of the camp-chairs. These had been placed in a semicircle that stretched across the room, and ended at the parlor organ. The door from Mr. Hallowell's bedroom opened directly upon the semicircle at the point most distant from the cabinet. In the centre of the semicircle Vance had placed the invalid's arm-chair.

Vance, in his manner as professional and undisturbed as a photographer focussing his camera and arranging his screens, was explaining to Judge Gaylor the setting of his stage. The judge was an unwilling audience. Unlike the showman, for him the occasion held only terrors. He was driven by misgivings, swept by sudden panics. He scowled at the cabinet, intruding upon the privacy of the room where for years, without the aid of accessories, by his brains alone, he had brought Mr. Hallowell almost to the point of abject submission to his wishes. He turned upon Vance with bitter self-disgust.

"So, I've got down as low as this, have I?" he demanded.

Vance heard him, undisturbed.

"I must ask you," he said, briskly, "to help me keep the people just as I seat them. They

will be in this half-circle facing the cabinet and holding hands. Those we know are against us," he explained, "will have one of my friends, Professor Strombergk, or Mrs. Marsh, or my wife, on each side of him. If there should be any attempt to rush the cabinet, we must get there first. I will be outside the cabinet working the rappings, the floating music, and the astral bodies." At the sight of the expression these words brought to the face of Gaylor, Vance permitted himself the shadow of a smile. "I can take care of myself," he went on, "but remember—Vera must not be caught outside the cabinet! When the lights go up, she must be found with the ropes still tied."

Gaylor turned from him with an exclamation of disgust.

"Pah!" he muttered. "It's a hell of a business!"

Vance continued unmoved. "And, another thing," he said, "about these lights: this switch throws them all off, doesn't it?" He pressed a button on the left of the door, and the electric lights in the walls and under a green shade on the library table faded and disappeared, leaving the room, save for the light from the hall, in darkness.

"That's the way we want it," said the showman.

From the hall Mannie appeared between the curtains that hung across the doorway. "What are you doing with the lights?" he demanded. "You want to break my neck? All our people are downstairs," he announced.

Vance turned on the lights. At the same moment Rainey came from the bedroom into the library. It was evident that to sustain his courage he had been drinking. He made no effort to greet those in the room, but stood, glaring resentfully at the cabinet and the row of chairs.

"Well," exclaimed Vance cheerfully, "if our folks are all here, we're all right."

Glancing behind him, Mannie took Vance by the sleeve, and led him to the centre of the room.

"No, we're not all right," said the boy; "that Miss Coates has brought a friend with her. She says Hallowell told her she could bring a friend. She says this young fellow is her friend. I think he's a Pink!"

"What nonsense," exclaimed Gaylor in alarm. "No detective would force his way into this house."

"She says," continued Mannie, disregarding Gaylor, and still addressing Vance, " 'he's a

seeker after the Truth.' I'll bet," declared the boy violently, "he's a seeker after the truth!"

Garrett came hastily and noiselessly into the room. He nodded toward Mannie.

"Has he told you?" he asked.

"Yes," Gaylor answered; "who is he?"

"The reporter who was here this morning," Garrett returned. "The one who threatened——"

"That'll do," commanded Gaylor. In the face of this new complication he again became himself. Suavely and politely he turned to Vance. "Will you and your friend join Miss Vera," he asked, "and tell her that we begin in a few minutes?"

For the first time, aggressively and offensively Rainey broke his silence.

"No, we won't begin in a few minutes," he announced, "not by a damned sight!"

The explosion was so unexpected that, for an instant, while the eyes of all were fixed in astonishment upon the speaker, there was complete silence. Gaylor, still suave, still polite, looked toward Vance, and motioned him to the door.

"Will you kindly do as I ask?" he said. With Mannie at his side, Vance walked quickly from the room. Once in the hall, the boy laid a detaining hand upon the arm of the older man.

"If you'll take my advice, which you won't," he said, "we'll all cut and run *now*, while we got the chance!"

In the library, Gaylor turned savagely upon his fellow-conspirator.

"Well!" he demanded.

Rainey frowned at him sulkily. "I wash my hands of the whole thing!" he cried.

Gaylor dropped his voice to a whisper.

"What are you afraid of now?" he demanded. "If you're not afraid of a district attorney, why are you afraid of a reporter?"

"I'm not afraid of anybody," returned Rainey, thickly. "But, I don't mean to be a party to no murder!" He paused, shaking his head portentously. "That man in there," he whispered, nodding toward the bedroom, "is in no condition to go through this. After that shock this morning, and last night—it'll kill him. His heart's rotten, I tell you, rotten!"

Garrett snarled contemptuously.

"How do you know?" he demanded.

"How do I know?" returned Rainey, fiercely; "I was four years in a medical college, when you were in jail, you——"

"Stop that!" cried Gaylor. Glancing fearfully toward the open door, he interposed between them.

"Don't take my advice, then," cried Rainey. "Go on! Kill him! And he won't sign your will. Only, don't say I didn't tell you."

"Have you told *him?*" demanded Gaylor.

"Yes," Rainey answered stoutly. "Told him if he didn't stop this, he wouldn't live till morning."

"Are *we* forcing him to do this?" demanded Gaylor. "No! he's forcing it on us. My God!" he exclaimed, "do you think I want this farce? You say, yourself, you told him it would kill him, and he will go on with it. Then why do you blame us? Can we help ourselves?"

The butler had distinguished the sounds of footsteps in the hall. He fell hastily to rearranging the camp-chairs.

"Hush!" he warned. "Look out!" Gaylor and Rainey had but time to move apart, when Winthrop entered. He regarded the three men with a smile of understanding.

"I beg pardon," he exclaimed, "I am interrupting?"

Gaylor greeted him with exaggerated heartiness.

"Ah, it is Mr. Winthrop!" he cried. "Have you come to help us find out the truth this evening?"

"I certainly hope not!" said Winthrop brusque-

ly. "I know the truth about too many people already." He turned to Garrett, who, unobtrusively, was endeavoring to make his escape.

"I want to see Miss Vera," he said.

"Miss Vera,' interposed Gaylor. "I'm afraid that's not possible. She especially asked not to be disturbed before the seance. I'm sorry."

Winthrop's manner became suspiciously polite.

"Yes?" he inquired. "Well, nevertheless I think I'll ask *her*. Tell Miss Vera, please," he said to Garrett, "that Mr. Winthrop would like a word with her here," with significance he added, "in private."

In offended dignity, Judge Gaylor moved toward the door. "Dr. Rainey," he said stiffly, "will you please inform Mr. Hallowell that his guests are now here, and that I have gone to bring them upstairs."

"Yes, but you won't bring them upstairs, please," said Winthrop, "until you hear from me."

Gaylor flushed with anger and for a moment appeared upon the point of mutiny. Then, as though refusing to consider himself responsible for the manners of the younger man, he shrugged his shoulders and left the room.

With even less of consideration than he had shown to Judge Gaylor, Winthrop turned upon Rainey.

"How's your patient?" he asked shortly. Rainey was sufficiently influenced by the liquor he had taken to dare to resent Winthrop's peremptory tone. His own in reply was designedly offensive.

"My patient?" he inquired.

"Mr. Hallowell," snapped Winthrop; "he's sick, isn't he?"

"Oh, I don't know," returned the Doctor.

"You don't know?" demanded Winthrop. "Well, *I* know. I know if he goes through this thing to-night, he'll have another collapse. I saw one this morning. Why don't you forbid it? You're his medical adviser, aren't you?"

Rainey remained sullenly silent.

"Answer me!" insisted the District Attorney. "You are, aren't you?"

"I am," at last declared Rainey.

"Well, then," commanded Winthrop, "tell him to stop this. Tell him *I* advise it."

Through his glasses Rainey blinked violently at the District Attorney, and laughed.

"I didn't know," he said, "that *you* were a medical man."

Winthrop looked at the Doctor so steadily, and for so long a time, that the eyes of the young man sought the floor and the ceiling; and his sneer changed to an expression of discomfort.

"I am not," said Winthrop. "I am the District Attorney of New York." His tones were cold, precise; they fell upon the superheated brain of Dr. Rainey like drops from an icicle. "When I took over that office," continued Winthrop, "I found a complaint against two medical students, a failure to report the death of an old man in a private sanitarium." Winthrop lowered his eyes, and became deeply absorbed in the toe of his boot. "I haven't looked into the papers, yet," he said.

Rainey, swaying slightly, jerked open the door of the bedroom. "I'll tell him," he panted thickly. "I'll tell him to do as you say."

"Thank you, I wish you would," said Winthrop.

At the same moment, from the hall, Garrett announced, "Mrs. Vance, sir." And Mabel Vance, tremulous and frightened, entered the room.

Winthrop approached her eagerly.

"Ah! Mrs. Vance," he exclaimed, "can I see Miss Vera?"

Embarrassed and unhappy, Mrs. Vance moved restlessly from foot to foot, and shook her head.

"Please, Mr. District Attorney," she begged, "I'm afraid not. This afternoon upset her so. And she's so nervous and queer that the Professor thinks she shouldn't see nobody."

Winthrop nodded comprehendingly.

"The Professor?" he commented. His voice was considerate, conciliatory. "Now, Mrs. Vance," he said, "I've known Miss Vera ever since she was a little girl, known her longer than you have, and, I'm her friend, and you're her friend, and——"

"I am," protested Mabel Vance tearfully. "Indeed I am!"

"I know you are," Winthrop interrupted hastily. "You've been more than a friend to her, you've been a sister, mother, and you don't want any trouble to come to her, do you?"

"I don't," cried the woman. "Oh!" she exclaimed miserably, "I told them there'd be trouble!"

Winthrop laughed reassuringly.

"Well, there won't be any trouble," he declared, "if *I* can help it. And if you want to help her, help me. Persuade her to let me talk to her. Don't mind what the Professor says."

"I will," declared Mrs. Vance with determination, "I will." She started eagerly toward the

hall, and then paused and returned. Her hands were clasped; her round, baby eyes, wet with tears, were fixed upon Winthrop appealingly.

"Oh, please," she pleaded, "you're not going to hurt him, are you? Paul, my husband," she explained; "he's been such a good husband to me."

Winthrop laughed uneasily.

"Why, that'll be all right," he protested.

"He doesn't mean any harm," insisted Mrs. Vance; "he's on the level; true, he is!"

"Why, of course, of course," Winthrop assented.

Unsatisfied, Mrs. Vance burst into tears. "It's this spirit business that makes the trouble!" she cried. "I tell them to cut it out. Now, the mind-reading at the theatre," she sobbed, "there's no harm in that, is there? And there's twice the money in it. But this ghost raising"— she raised her eyes appealingly, as though begging to be contradicted—"it's sure to get him into trouble, isn't it?"

Winthrop shook his head, and smiled.

"It may," he said. Mrs. Vance broke into a fresh outburst of tears. "I knew it," she cried, "I knew it." Winthrop placed his hand upon her arm and turned her in the direction of the door.

"Don't worry," he said soothingly. "Go send Miss Vera here. And," he called after her, "don't worry."

As Mabel departed upon his errand, Rainey re-entered from the bedroom. He carefully closed the door and halted with his hand upon the knob, and shook his head.

"It's no use," he said, "he will go on with it. It's not my fault," he whined; "I told him it would kill him. I couldn't make it any stronger than that, could I?"

Rainey was not looking at Winthrop, but, as though fearful of interruption, toward the door. His eyes were harassed, furtive, filled with miserable indecision. Many times before Winthrop had seen men in such a state. He knew that for the sufferer it foretold a physical break-down, or that he would seek relief in full confession. To give the man confidence, he abandoned his attitude of suspicion.

"That certainly would be strong enough for me," he said cheerfully. "Did you tell him what I advised?"

"Yes, yes," muttered Rainey impatiently. "He said you were invited here to give advice to his niece, not to him." For the first time his eyes met those of Winthrop boldly. The District

Attorney recognized that the man had taken his fears by the throat, and had arrived at his decision.

"See here," exclaimed Rainey; "could I give you some information?"

"I'm sure you could," returned Winthrop briskly. "Give it to me now."

But Rainey, glancing toward the door, shrank back. Winthrop, following the direction of his eyes, saw Vera. Impatiently he waved Rainey away.

"At the office, to-morrow morning," he commanded.

With a sigh of relief at the reprieve, Rainey slipped back into the bedroom.

Winthrop had persuaded himself that in seeking to speak with Vera, he was making only a natural choice between preventing the girl from perpetrating a fraud, or, later, for that fraud, holding her to account. But when she actually stood before him, he recognized how absurdly he had deceived himself. At the mere physical sight of her, there came to him a swift relief, a thrill of peace and deep content; and with delighted certainty he knew that what Vera might do or might not do concerned him not at all, that for him all that counted was the girl herself. With something of this showing in his face, he came eagerly toward her.

"Vera!" he exclaimed. In the word there was delight, wonder, tenderness; but if the girl recognized this she concealed her knowledge. Instead, her eyes looked into his frankly; her manner was that of open friendliness.

"Mabel tells me you want to talk to me," she said evenly, "but I don't want you to. *I* have something I want to say to you. I could have written it, but this"—for an instant the girl paused with her lips pressed together; when she spoke, her voice carried the firmness and finality of one delivering a verdict—"but this," she repeated, "is the last time you shall hear from me, or see me again."

Winthrop gave an exclamation of impatience, of indignation.

"No," returned the girl, "it is quite final. Maybe you will not want to see me, but——"

Winthrop again sharply interrupted her. His voice was filled with reproach. "Vera!" he protested.

"Well," said the girl more gently, "I'm glad to think you do, but this is the last, and before I go, I——"

"Go!" demanded Winthrop roughly. "Where?"

"Before I go," continued the girl, "I want to

tell you how much you have helped me—I want to thank you——"

"You haven't let me thank you," broke in Winthrop, "and, now, you pretend this is our last meeting. It's absurd!"

"It is our last meeting," replied the girl. Of the two, for the moment, she was the older, the more contained.

"On the contrary," contradicted the man. He spoke sharply, in a tone he tried to make as determined as her own. "Our next meeting will be in ten minutes—at my sister's. I have told her about this afternoon, and about you; and she wants very much to meet you. She has sent her car for you. It's waiting in front of the house. Now," he commanded masterfully, "you come with me, and get in it, and leave all this"—he gave an angry, contemptuous wave of the hand toward the cabinet—"behind you, as," he added earnestly, "you promised me you would."

As though closing from sight the possibility he suggested, the girl shut her eyes quickly, and then opened them again to meet his.

"I can't leave these things behind me," she said quietly. "I told you so this afternoon. For a moment, you made me think I could, and I

did promise. I didn't need to promise. It's what I've prayed for. Then, you saw what happened, you saw I was right. Within five minutes that woman came——"

"That woman had a motive," protested Winthrop.

"That woman," continued the girl patiently, "or some other woman. What does it matter? In five minutes, or five days, some one would have told." She leaned toward him anxiously. "I'm not complaining," she said; "it's my own fault. It's the life I've chosen." She hesitated and then, as though determined to carry out a programme she had already laid down for herself, continued rapidly: "And what I want to tell you, is, that what's best in that life I owe to you."

"Vera!" cried the man sharply.

"Listen!" said the girl. Her eyes were alight, eager. She spoke frankly, proudly, without embarrassment, without fear of being misconstrued, as a man might speak to a man.

"I'd be ungrateful, I'd be a coward," said the girl, "if I went away and didn't tell you. For ten years I've been counting on you. I made you a sort of standard. I said, as long as he keeps to his ideals, I'm going to keep to mine. Maybe you think my ideals have not been very high,

but anyway you've made it easy for me. Because I'm in this business, because I'm good-looking enough, certain men"—the voice of the girl grew hard and cool—"have done me the honor to insult me, and it was knowing you, and that there are others like you, that helped me not to care." The girl paused. She raised her eyes to his frankly. The look in them was one of pride in him, of loyalty, of affection. "And now, since I've met you," she went on, "I find you're just as I imagined you'd be, just as I'd hoped you'd be." She reached out her hand warningly, appealingly. "And I don't want you to change, to let down, to grow discouraged. You can't tell how many more people are counting on you." She hesitated and, as though at last conscious of her own boldness, flushed deprecatingly, like one asking pardon. "You men in high places," she stammered, "you're like light-houses showing the way. You don't know how many people you are helping. You can't see them. You can't tell how many boats are following your light, but if your light goes out, they are wrecked." She gave a sigh of relief. "That's what I wanted to tell you," she said; "and, so thank you." She held out her hand. "And, good-by."

Winthrop's answer was to clasp her hand

quickly in both of his, and draw her toward him.

"Vera," he begged, "come with me now!"

The girl withdrew her hand and moved away from him, frowning. "No," she said, "no; you do not *want* to understand. I have my work to do to-night."

Winthrop gave an exclamation of anger.

"You don't mean to tell me," he cried, "that you're going on with this?"

"Yes," she said. And then in sudden alarm cried: "But not if you're here! I'll fail if you're here. Promise me, you will not be here."

"Indeed," cried the man indignantly, "I will not! But I'll be downstairs when you need me. And," he added warningly, "you'll need me."

"No," said the girl. "No matter what happens, I tell you, between us, this is the end."

"Then," begged the man, "if this is the end, for God's sake, Vera, as my last request, do not do it!"

The girl shook her head. "No," she repeated firmly. "I've tried to get away from it, and each time they've forced me back. Now, I'll go on with it. I've promised Paul, and the others. And you heard me promise that woman."

"But you didn't mean that!" protested the man. "She insulted you; you were angry. You're angry now, piqued——"

"Mr. Winthrop," interrupted the girl, "to-day you told me I was not playing the game. You told the truth. When you said this was a mean business, you were right. But"—for the first time since she had spoken her tones were shaken, uncertain—"I've been driven out of every other business." She waited until her voice was again under control, and then said slowly, definitely, "And, to-night, I am going to show Mr. Hallowell the spirit of his sister."

In the eyes of Winthrop the look of pain, of disappointment, of reproach, was so keen, that the girl turned her own away.

"No," said the man gently, "you will not do that."

"You can stop my doing it to-night," returned the girl, "but at some other time, at some other place, I will do it."

"You yourself will stop it," said Winthrop. "You are too honest, too fine, to act such a lie. Why not be yourself?" he begged. "Why not disappoint these other people who do not know you? Why disappoint the man who knows you best, who trusts you, who believes in you——"

"You are the very one," interrupted the girl, "who doesn't know me. I am not fine; I am not honest. I *am* a charlatan and a cheat; I am all that woman called me. And that is why you can't know me. That's why, I told you, if you did, you would be sorry."

"I am not sorry," said Winthrop.

"You will be," returned the girl, "before the night is over."

"On the contrary," answered the man quietly, "I shall wait here to congratulate you—on your failure."

"I shall not fail," said the girl. Avoiding his eyes, she turned from him and, for a moment, stood gazing before her miserably. Her lips were trembling, her eyes moist with rising tears. Then she faced him, her head raised defiantly.

"I have been hounded out of every decent way of living," she protested hysterically. "I can make thousands of dollars to-night," she cried, "out of this one."

Winthrop looked straight into her eyes. His own were pleading, full of tenderness and pity; so eloquent with meaning that those of the girl fell before them.

"That is no answer," said the man. "You know it's not. I tell you—you will fail."

From the hall Judge Gaylor entered noisily. Instinctively the man and girl moved nearer together, and upon the intruder Winthrop turned angrily.

"Well?" he demanded sharply.

"I thought you had finished your talk," protested the Judge. "Mr. Hallowell is anxious to begin."

Winthrop turned and looked at Vera steadily. For an instant the eyes of the girl faltered, and then she returned his glance with one as resolute as his own. As though accepting her verdict as final, Winthrop walked quickly to the door. "I shall be downstairs," he said; "when this is over, let me know."

Gaylor struggled to conceal his surprise and satisfaction. "You won't be here for the seance?" he exclaimed.

"Certainly not," cried Winthrop. "I—" He broke off suddenly. Without again looking toward Vera, or trying to hide his displeasure, he left the room

Gaylor tu d to the girl. He was smiling with relief.

"Excellent!" he muttered. "Excellent! What was he saying to you," he asked eagerly, "as I came in—that you would fail?"

The girl moved past him to the door. "Yes," she answered dully.

"But you will not!" cried the man. "We're all counting on you, you know. 'Destroy the old will. Sign the new will,'" he quoted. He came close to her and whispered: "That means thousands of dollars to you and Vance," he urged.

The girl turned and regarded him with unhappy, angry eyes.

"You need not be frightened," she answered. For the man before her and for herself, her voice was bitter with contempt and self-accusation. "Mr. Winthrop is mistaken. He does not know me," she said miserably. "I shall not fail."

For a moment, after she had left him, Gaylor stood motionless, his eyes filled with concern, and then, with a shrug, as though accepting either good or evil fortune, he called from the bedroom Mr. Hallowell, and, from the floor below, the guests of Hallowell and of Vance.

As Hallowell, supported by Rainey, sank into the invalid's chair in the centre of the semicircle, Gaylor made his final appeal.

"Stephen," he begged; "are you sure you're feeling strong enough? Won't some other night——"

The old man interrupted him querulously.

"No, *now!* I want it over," he commanded. "Who knows," he complained, "how soon it may be before——"

The sight of Mannie entering the room with Vance caused him to interrupt himself abruptly. He greeted the showman with a curt nod.

"And who is this?" he demanded.

Mannie, to whom a living millionaire was much more of a disturbing spectacle than the ghost of Alexander the Great, retreated hastily behind Vance.

"He is my assistant," Vance explained. "He furnishes the music." He pushed Mannie toward the organ.

"Music!" growled Hallowell. "Must there be music?"

"It is indispensable," protested Vance. "Music, sir, is one of the strongest psychic influences. It——"

"Nonsense!" cried Hallowell. "Tricks," he muttered; "tricks!"

Vance shrugged his shoulders, and smiled in deprecation. "I am sorry to find you in a sceptical mood, Mr. Hallowell," he murmured reprovingly. "It will hardly help to produce good results. Allow me," he begged, "to present two true believers."

With a wave of the hand he beckoned forward a stout, gray-haired woman with bulging, near-sighted eyes that rolled meaninglessly behind heavy gold spectacles.

"Mrs. Marsh, of Lynn, Massachusetts," proclaimed Vance, "of whom you have heard. Mrs. Marsh," he added, "is probably the first medium in America. The results she has obtained are quite wonderful. She alone foretold the San Francisco earthquake, and the run on the Long Acre Square Bank."

"I am glad to know you," said Mr. Hallowell. "Pardon my not rising."

The old lady curtesied obsequiously.

"Oh, certainly, Mr. Hallowell," she protested. "Mr. Hallowell," she went on, rolling the name delightedly on her tongue, "I need not tell you how greatly we spiritualists rejoice over your joining the ranks of the believers."

Hallowell nodded. He was not altogether unimpressed. "Thanks," he commented dryly. "But I am not quite there yet, madam."

"We hope," said Vance sententiously, "to convince Mr. Hallowell to-night."

"And I am sure, Mr. Hallowell," cried the old lady, "if any one can do it, little Miss Vera can. Hers is a wonderful gift, sir, a wonderful gift!"

"I am glad to hear you say so," returned Hallowell.

He nodded to her in dismissal, and turned to the next visitor. "And this gentleman?" he asked.

"Professor Strombergk," announced Vance; "the distinguished writer on psychic and occult subjects, editor of *The World Beyond*."

A tall, full-bearded German, in a too-short frock-coat, bowed awkwardly. Upon him, as upon Mannie, had fallen the spell of the Hallowell fortune. He, who chatted familiarly with departed popes and emperors, who daily was in communication with Goethe, Cæsar, and Epictetus, thrilled with embarrassment before the man who had made millions from a coupling-pin.

"And Helen!" Mr. Hallowell cried, as Miss Coates followed the Professor. "That is all, is it not?" he asked.

Miss Coates moved aside to disclose the person of the reporter from the *Republic*, Homer Lee.

"I have taken you at your word, uncle," she said; "and have brought a friend with me." In some trepidation she added:

"He is Mr. Lee, a reporter from the *Republic*."

"A reporter!" exclaimed Mr. Hallowell. Disturbed and yet amused at the audacity of his

'Professor Strombergk," announced Vance

niece, he shook his head reprovingly. "I don't think I meant reporters," he remonstrated.

"You said in your note," returned his niece, "that as I had so much at stake, I could bring any one I pleased, and the less he believed in spiritualism, the better. Mr. Lee," she added dryly, "believes even less than I do."

"Then it will be all the more of a triumph, if we convince him," declared Hallowell. "Understand, young man," he proclaimed loudly, "I am not a spiritualist. I am merely conducting an investigation. I want the truth. If you, or my niece, detect any fraud to-night, I want to know it." Including in his speech the others in the room, he glared suspiciously in turn at each. "Keep your eyes open," he ordered; "you will be serving me quite as much as you will Miss Coates."

Miss Coates and Lee thanked him and, recognizing themselves as the opposition and in the minority, withdrew for consultation into a corner of the bay-window.

Vance approached Mr. Hallowell.

"If you are ready," he said, "we will examine the cabinet. Shall I wheel it over here, or will you look at it where it is?"

"If it is to be in that corner during the seance," declared Mr. Hallowell, "I'll look at it where it is."

As he struggled from his chair, he turned to Mrs. Marsh, and nodded his head knowingly. "You see, Mrs. Marsh," he said, "I am taking no chances."

"That is quite right, Mr. Hallowell," purred the old lady. "If there be any doubt in your mind, you must get rid of it, or we will have no results."

With a dramatic gesture, Vance swept aside from the opening in the cabinet the black velvet curtain. "It's a simple affair," he said indifferently. "As you see, it's open at the top and bottom. The medium sits inside on that chair, bound hand and foot."

In turn, Mr. Hallowell, Mrs. Marsh, Gaylor, Rainey, Professor Strombergk entered the cabinet. With their knuckles they beat upon its sides. They moved it to and fro. They dropped to their knees, and with their fingers tugged at the carpet upon which it stood.

Under cover of their questions, in the corner of the bay-window, Miss Coates whispered to Lee:

"Don't look now," she warned, "but later, you will see on the left of that door the switch that throws on the lights. When I am sure she is outside the cabinet, when she has told him *not* to give the money to me, I'll cry, 'now!' and whichever one of us is seated nearer to the switch

will turn on all the lights. I think," Miss Coates added with, in her voice, a thrill of triumph not altogether free from a touch of vindictiveness, "when my uncle sees her caught in the middle of the room, disguised as his sister—we will have cured him."

"It may be," said the man.

The possibility of success as Miss Coates pointed it out did not appear to stir in him any great delight. He glanced unwillingly over his shoulder. "I see the switch," he said.

Leaning on the arm of Gaylor, Mr. Hallowell returned from the cabinet to his chair. What he had seen apparently strengthened his faith and, in like degree, inspired him to greater enthusiasm.

"Well," he exclaimed, "there are no trap-doors or false bottoms about that! If they can project a spirit from that sentry box, it will be a miracle. For whom are we waiting?" he asked impatiently. "Where is Winthrop?"

Judge Gaylor explained that Winthrop preferred to wait downstairs, and that he had said he would remain there until the seance was finished.

"Afraid of compromising his position," commented the old man. "I'm sorry. I'd like to have him here." He motioned Gaylor to bend

nearer. In a voice that trembled with eagerness and excitement, he whispered: "Henry, I have a feeling that we are going to witness a remarkable phenomenon."

Gaylor's countenance grew preternaturally grave. He nodded heavily.

"I have the same feeling, Stephen," he returned.

Vance raised his hand to command silence.

"Every one," he called, "except the committee, who are to bind and tie the medium, will take the place I give him, and remain in it. Mr. Day will please acquaint Miss Vera and Mrs. Vance with the fact that we are ready."

Up to this point Vance had appeared only as a stage manager. He had been concerned with his groupings, his lights; in assigning to his confederates the parts they were to play. Now that the curtain was to rise, as an actor puts on a wig and grease paint, Vance assumed a certain voice and manner. On the stage the critics would have called him a convincing actor. He made his audience believe what he believed. He knew the eloquence of a pause, the value of a surprised, unintelligible exclamation. One moment he was as professionally solemn as a "funeral director"; the next, his voice, his whole frame, would shake

with excitement, in an outburst of fanatic fervor. As it pleased him he could play *Hamlet*, tenderly shocked at the sight of his dead father, or *Macbeth*, retreating in horror before the ghost of *Banquo*. For the moment his manner was that of the undertaker.

"Now, Mr. Hallowell," he said hoarsely, "please to name those you wish to serve on the committee."

Mr. Hallowell waved his arm to include every one in the room.

"Everybody will serve on the committee," he declared. "Everything is to be open and aboveboard. The whole city is welcome on the committee. I want this to be above suspicion."

"That is my wish, also, sir," said Vance stiffly. "But a committee of more than three is unwieldy. Suppose you name two gentlemen and I one? Or," he shrugged his shoulders, "you can name all three."

After a moment of consideration Mr. Hallowell pointed at Lee. "I choose Mr.—that young man," he announced, "and Judge Gaylor."

"I would much rather not, Stephen," Judge Gaylor whispered.

"I know, Henry," answered the other; "but I ask it of you. It will give me confidence." He

turned to Vance. "You select some one" he commanded.

With a bow, Vance designated the tall German.

"Will Professor Strombergk be acceptable?" he asked.

Mr. Hallowell nodded.

"Then, the three gentlemen chosen will please come to the cabinet."

Vance, his manner now that of a master of ceremonies, assigned to each person the seat he or she was to occupy. Miss Coates with satisfaction noted that only Mrs. Vance separated Lee from the electric switch.

"I must ask you," said Vance, "to keep the seats I have assigned to you. With us to-night are both favorable and unfavorable influences. And what I have tried to do in placing you, is to obtain the best psychic results." He moved to the door and looked into the hall, then turned, and with uplifted arm silently demanded attention.

"Miss Vera," he announced.

Followed closely, like respectful courtiers, by Mannie and Mrs. Vance, Vera appeared in the doorway, walked a few feet into the room, and stood motionless. As though already in a trance, she moved slowly, without volition, like a somnambulist. Her head was held high, but her

eyes were dull and unseeing. Her arms hung limply. She wore an evening gown of soft black stuff, that clung to her like a lace shawl, and which left her throat and arms bare. In spite of the clash of interests, of antagonism, of mutual distrust, there was no one present to whom the sight of the young girl did not bring an uneasy thrill. The nature of the thing she proposed to do, contrasted with the loveliness of her face, which seemed to mock at the possibility of deceit; something in her rapt, distant gaze, in the dignity of her uplifted head, in her air of complete detachment from her surroundings, caused even the most sceptical to question if she might not possess the power she claimed, to feel for a moment the approach of the supernatural.

The voices of the committee, consulting together, dropped suddenly to a whisper; the others were instantly silent.

In his arms Mannie carried silken scarfs, cords, and ropes. In each hand he held a teacup. One contained flour, the other shot. Vance took these from him, and Mannie hurriedly slipped into his chair in front of the organ.

"Gentlemen," explained Vance, "you will use these ropes and scarfs to tie the medium. Also, as a further precaution against the least suspicion

of fraud, we will subject her to the most severe test known. In one hand she will hold this flour; the other will be filled with shot. This will make it impossible for her to tamper with the ropes."

He gave the two cups to Gaylor, and turned to Vera.

"Are you ready?" he asked. After a pause, the girl slightly inclined her head. Lee, with one of the scarfs in his hand, approached her diffidently. He looked unhappily at the slight, girlish figure, at the fair white arms. In his embarrassment he appealed to Vance.

"How would you suggest?" he asked.

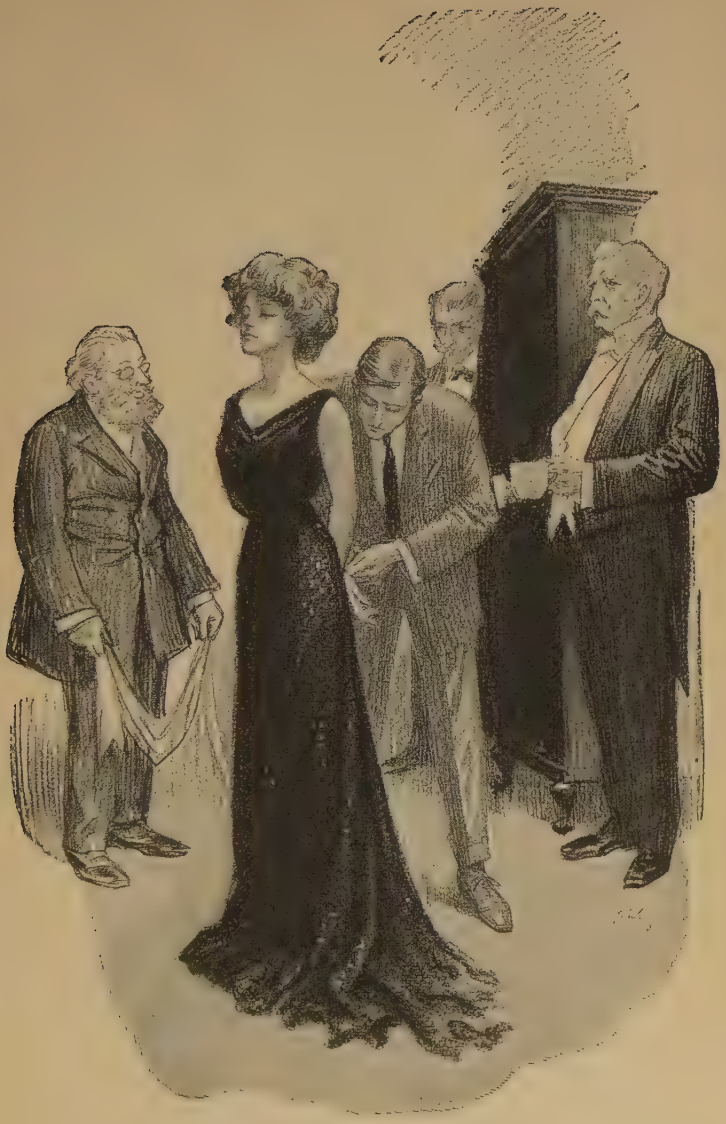
Vance, apparently shocked, hastily drew away. "That would be most irregular," he protested.

Apologetically Lee turned to the girl.

"Would you mind putting your arms behind you?" he asked. He laced the scarf around her arms, and drew it tightly to her wrists.

"Tell me if I hurt you," he murmured; but the girl made no answer. To what was going forward she appeared as unmindful as though she were an artist's manikin.

"Will you take these now?" asked Gaylor; and into her open palms he poured the flour and shot. "And, now," continued Lee, "will you go into the cabinet?" As she seated herself, he knelt



"Tell me if I hurt you," he murmured

in front of her and bound her ankles. From behind her Strombergk deftly wound the ropes about her body and through the rungs and back of the chair.

"Would you mind seeing if you can withdraw your arms?" Lee asked. The girl raised her shoulders, struggled to free her hands, and tried to rise. But the efforts were futile.

"Are the gentlemen satisfied?" demanded Vance.

The three men, who had shown but little heart in the work, and who were now red and embarrassed, hastily answered in the affirmative.

"If you are satisfied the ropes are securely fastened," Vance continued, "you will take your seats." Professor Strombergk, as he moved to his chair, announced in devout, solemn tones: "Nothing but spirit hands can move those ropes now."

From the organ rose softly the prelude to a Moody and Sankey hymn, and, in keeping with the music, the voice of Vance sank to a low tone.

"We will now," he said, "establish the magnetic chain. Each person will take with his right hand the left wrist of the person on his or her right." He paused while this order was being carried into effect.

"Before I turn out the lights," he continued, "I wish to say a last word to any sceptic who may be present. I warn him that any attempt to lay violent hands upon the apparition, or spirit, may cost the medium her life. From the cabinet the medium projects the spirit into the circle. An attack upon the spirit, is an attack upon the medium. There are three or four well-authenticated cases where the disembodied spirit was cut off from the cabinet, and the medium died."

He drew the velvet curtains across the cabinet, and shut Vera from view. "Are you ready, Mr. Hallowell?" he asked. Mr. Hallowell, his eyes staring, his lips parted, nodded his head. The music grew louder. Vance switched off the lights.

For some minutes, except for the creaking of the pedals of the organ and the low throb of the music, there was no sound. Then, from his position at the open door, the voice of Vance commanded sternly: "No whispering, please. The medium is susceptible to the least sound." There was another longer pause, until in hushed expectant tones Vance spoke again. "The air is very heavily charged with electricity to-night," he said. "*You*, Mrs. Marsh, should feel that?"

"I do, Professor," murmured the medium; "I do. We shall have some wonderful results!"

Vance agreed with her solemnly. "I feel influences all about me," he murmured.

There came suddenly from the cabinet three sharp raps. These were instantly answered by other quick rappings upon the library table. "They are beginning!" chanted the voice of Vance. The music of the organ ceased. It was at once followed by the notes of a guitar that seemed to float in space, the strings vibrating, not as though touched by human hands, but in fitful, meaningless chords like those of an Æolian harp.

"That is Kiowa, *your* control, Mrs. Marsh," announced Vance eagerly. "Do you desire to speak to him?"

"Not to-night," Mrs. Marsh answered. She raised her voice. "Not to-night, Kiowa," she repeated. "Thank you for coming. Good-night."

In deep, guttural accents, a man's voice came from the ceiling. "Good-night," it called. With a final, ringing wail, the music of the guitar suddenly ceased.

Again rose the swelling low notes of the organ. Above it came the quick pattering of footsteps.

The voice of Rainey, filled with alarm, cried, "Some one touched me!"

"Are you sure your hands are held?" demanded Vance reprovingly.

"Yes," panted Rainey; "both of them. But something put its hand on my forehead. It was cold."

In an excited whisper, a voice in the circle cried, "Look, look!" and before the eyes of all, a star rose in the darkness. For a moment it wavered over the cabinet and then fluttered swiftly across the room and remained stationary above the head of the German Professor.

"There is your star, Professor," cried Vance. "When the Professor is in the circle," he announced proudly, "that star always appears."

He was interrupted by a startled exclamation from Lee.

"Something touched my face," explained the young man apologetically, "and spoke to me."

The music sank to a murmur, and the room became alive with swift, rushing sounds and soft whisperings.

The voice of Mrs. Marsh, low and eager, could be heard appealing to an invisible presence.

"The results are marvellous," chanted Vance; "marvellous! The medium is showing wonderful power. If any one desires to ask a question, he should do so now. The conditions will never be better." He paused expectantly. "Mr. Hallo-

well," he prompted, "is it your wish to communicate with any one in the spirit-world?"

There was a long pause, and then the voice of Mr. Hallowell, harsh and shaken, answered, "Yes."

"With whom?" demanded Vance.

There was again another longer pause, and then, above the confusion of soft whisperings, the voice of the old man rose in sharp staccato:

"My sister, Catherine Coates." His tone hardened, became obdurate, final. "But, I must see her, and hear her speak!"

Not for an instant did Vance hesitate. Intense, sepulchral tones, he demanded of the darkness, "Is the spirit of Catherine Coates present?"

The whisperings and murmurs ceased. The silence of the room was broken sharply by three quick raps. "Yes," intoned Vance; "she is present."

The voice of Hallowell protested fiercely. "I won't have that! I want to *see* her!"

In the tone of an incantation, Vance spoke again. "Will the spirit show herself to her brother?" The raps came quickly, firmly.

"She answers she will appear before you."

There was a moment that seemed to stretch interminably, and then, the eyes of all, straining in

the darkness, saw against the black velvet curtain a splash of white.

As it moved toward them it took shape, and by the faint light that came through the curtains from the hall, they distinguished the bent figure of a woman, apparently an old woman with a white cap and white hair, and across her shoulders a white kerchief.

Above the sobbing of the organ, the voice of Mr. Hallowell rang out in a sharp exclamation of terror. "Who is that!" he demanded. He spoke as though he dreaded the answer. He threw himself forward in his chair, peering into the darkness.

"Is that you, Kate?" he whispered. His voice was both incredulous and pleading. The answer came in feeble, trembling tones. "Yes."

The voice of Hallowell shook with eagerness.

"Do you know me, your brother, Stephen?"

"Yes."

With a cry the old man fell back, groping blindly. He found Gaylor's arm and clutched it with both hands.

"My God! It's Kate!" he gasped. "I tell you, Henry, it *is* Kate!"

The voice of Vance, deep and hollow like a bell, sounded a note of warning. "Speak quickly,"

he commanded. "Her time on earth is brief." Mr. Hallowell's hold upon the arm of his friend relaxed. Fearfully and slowly, he bent forward.

"Kate!" he pleaded; "I must ask you a question. No one else can tell me." As though gathering courage, he paused, and, with a frightened sigh, again began. "I am an old man," he murmured; "a sick man. I will be joining you very soon. *What* am I to do with my money? I have made great plans to give it to the poor. Or, must I give it, as I have given it in my will, to Helen? Perhaps I did not act fairly to you and Helen. You know what I mean. She would be rich, but then the poor would be that much the poorer." The confidence of the speaker was increasing; as though to a living being, he argued and pleaded. "And I want to do some good before I go. What shall I do? Tell me."

There was a pause that lasted so long that those who had held their breath to listen, again breathed deeply. When the answer came, it was strangely deprecatory, uncertain, unassured.

"You," stammered the voice, "you must have courage to do what you know to be just!"

For a brief moment, as though surprised, Mr. Hallowell apparently considered this; and then gave an exclamation of disappointment and distress.

"But I *don't* know," he protested; "that is why I called on you. I want to go into the next world, Kate," he pleaded, "with clean hands!"

This time the answer came more firmly. But it was still without feeling, without conviction.

"You cannot bribe your way into the next world," intoned the voice. "If you pity the poor, you must help the poor, not that you may cheat your way into heaven, but that they may suffer less. Search your conscience. Have the courage of your conscience."

"I don't *want* to consult my conscience," cried the old man. "I want *you* to tell me." He paused, hesitating. Eager to press his question, his awe of the apparition still restrained him.

"What do you mean, Kate?" he begged. "Am I to give the money where it will do the most good—to the Hallowell Institute, or am I to give it to Helen? Which am I to do?"

There was another long silence, and then the voice stammered: "If—if you have wronged me, or my daughter, or the poor, you must make restitution."

The hand of the old man was heard to fall heavily upon the arm of his chair. His voice rose unhappily.

"*That* is no answer, Kate!" he cried. "Did

you come from the dead to preach to me? Tell me—what am I to do—leave my money to Helen, or to the Institute?"

The cry of the old man vibrated in the air. No voice rose to answer. "Kate!" he entreated. Still there was silence. "Speak to me!" he commanded. The silence became eloquent with momentous possibilities. So long did it endure, that the pain of the suspense was actual. The voice of Rainey, choked and hoarse with fear, broke it with an exclamation that held the sound of an oath. He muttered thickly, "What in the name of——"

He was hushed by a swift chorus of hisses. The voice of Hallowell was again uplifted.

"Why won't she answer me?" he begged hysterically of Vance. "Can't you—can't the medium make her speak?"

During the last few moments the music from the organ had come brokenly. The hands upon the keys moved unsteadily, drunkenly. Now they halted altogether and in the middle of a chord the music sank and died. Upon the now absolute silence the voice of Vance, when he spoke, sounded strangely unfamiliar. It had lost the priest-like intonation. Its confidence had departed. It showed bewilderment and alarm.

"I—I don't understand," stammered the showman. "Ask her again. Put your question differently."

Carefully, slowly, giving each word its value, Mr. Hallowell raised his voice in entreaty.

"Kate," he cried, "I have made a new will, leaving the money to the poor. The old will gives it to Helen. Shall I sign the new will or not? Shall I give the money to Helen, or the Institute? Answer me! Yes, or no."

Before the eyes of all, the apparition, as though retreating to the cabinet, swayed backward, then staggered forward. There was a sob, human, heart-broken; a cry, thrilling with distress; a tumult of weeping, fierce and uncontrollable.

They saw the figure tear away the white kerchief and cap, and trample them upon the floor. They saw the figure hold itself erect. From it, the voice of Vera cried aloud, in despair:

"I can't! I can't!" she sobbed. "It's a lie! I am *not* your sister! Turn on the lights," the girl cried. "Turn on the lights!"

There was a crash of upturned chairs, the sound of men struggling, and the room was swept with light. In the doorway Winthrop was holding apart Vance and the reporter.

In the centre of the room stood Vera, her head

bent in shame, her body shaken and trembling, her hair streaming to her waist.

As though to punish herself, by putting a climax to her humiliation, she held out her arms to Helen Coates. "You see," she cried; "I *am* a cheat. I *am* a fraud!" She sank suddenly to her knees in front of Mr. Hallowell. "Forgive me," she sobbed; "forgive me!"

With a cry of angry protest, Winthrop ran to her, and lifted her to her feet. His eyes were filled with pity. But in the eyes of Mr. Hallowell there was no promise of pardon. With sudden strength he struggled to his feet and stood swaying, challenging those before him. His face was white with anger, his jaw closed against mercy.

"You've lied to me!" he cried. "You've tried to rob me!" He swept the room with his eyes. With a flash of intuition, he saw the trap they had laid for him. "All of you!" he screamed. "It's a plot!" He shook his fist at the weeping girl. "And you!" he shouted hysterically; "the law shall punish *you!*"

Winthrop drew the girl to him and put his arm about her.

"I'll do the punishing here," he said.

With a glad, welcoming cry, the old man turned to him appealingly, wildly.

"Yes, you!" he shouted. "*You* punish them! She plotted to get my money."

The girl at Winthrop's side shivered, and shrank from him. He drew her back roughly and held her close. The sobs that shook her tore at his heart; the touch of the sinking, trembling body in his arms filled him with fierce, jubilant thoughts of keeping the girl there always, of giving battle for her, of sheltering her against the world. In what she had done he saw only a sacrifice. In her he beheld only a penitent, who was self-accused and self-convicted.

He heard the voice of the old man screaming vindictively: "She plotted to get my money!"

Winthrop turned upon him savagely.

"How did you plot to get it?" he retorted fiercely. "You know, and I know. I know how your lawyer, your doctor, your servant plotted to get it!" His voice rose and rang with indignation. "You all plotted, and you all schemed—and to what end—what was the result?"—he held before them the fainting figure of the girl—"That one poor child could prove she was honest!"

With his arms still about her, and her hands clinging to him, he moved with her quickly to the door. When they had reached the silence of the hall, he took her hands in his, and looked into her

eyes. "Now," he commanded, "you shall come to my sisters!"

The waiting car carried them swiftly up the avenue. Their way lay through the park, and the warm, mid-summer air was heavy with the odor of plants and shrubs. Above them the trees drooped deep with leaves. Vera, crouched in a corner, had not spoken. Her eyes were hidden in her hands. But when they had entered the silent reaches of the park she lowered them and the face she lifted to Winthrop was pale and wet with tears. The man thought never before had he seen it more lovely or more lovable. Vera shook her head dumbly and looked up at him with a troubled smile.

"I told you," she murmured remorsefully, "you'd be sorry."

"We don't know that yet," said Winthrop gently; "we'll have all the rest of our lives to find that out."

Startled, the girl drew back. In her face was wonder, amazement, a dawning happiness.

Without speaking, Winthrop looked at her, entreatingly, pitifully, beseeching her with his eyes.

Slowly the girl bent forward and, as he threw out his arms, with a little sigh of rest and content she crept into them and pressed her face to his.

"MISS CIVILIZATION"

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

*** "MISS CIVILIZATION" is founded on a story by the late JAMES HARVEY SMITH. All professional rights in this play belong to RICHARD HARDING DAVIS. Amateurs who desire to produce "MISS CIVILIZATION" may do so, providing they apply for permission to the editor of *Collier's Weekly*, in which publication this play was first printed.

PEOPLE IN THE PLAY

ALICE GARDNER, *daughter of James K. Gardner, President of the L. I. & W. Railroad*

"UNCLE" JOSEPH HATCH, *alias "Gentleman Joe"*

"BRICK" MEAKIN, *alias "Reddy, the Kid"*

HARRY HAYES, *alias "Grand Stand" Harry*

CAPTAIN LUCAS, *Chief of Police*

POLICEMEN, BRAKEMEN, ENGINEERS

"MISS CIVILIZATION"

SCENE.—The dining-room in the country house of James K. Gardner on Long Island. In the back wall is a double doorway opening into a hall. A curtain divided in the middle hangs across the entrance. On the wall on either side of the doorway are two electric lights, and to the left is a telephone. Further to the left is a sideboard. On it are set silver salvers, candlesticks, and Christmas presents of silver. They still are in the red flannel bags in which they arrived. In the left wall is a recessed window hung with curtains. Against the right wall is a buffet on which is set a tea-caddy, toast-rack, and tea-kettle. Below the buffet a door opens into the butler's pantry. A dinner-table stands well down the stage with a chair at each end and on either side. Two chairs are set against the back wall to the right of the door. The walls and windows are decorated with holly and mistletoe and Christmas wreaths tied with bows of scarlet ribbon. When the window is opened there is a view of falling snow. At first the room is in complete darkness.

The time is the day after Christmas, near midnight.

After the curtain rises one hears the noise of a file scraping on iron. It comes apparently from outside the house at a point distant from the dining-room. The filing is repeated cautiously, with a wait between each stroke, as though the person using the file had paused to listen.

ALICE GARDNER enters at centre, carrying a lighted candle in a silver candlestick. She wears a dressing-gown, with swan's-down around her throat and at the edges of her sleeves. Her feet are in bed-room slippers topped with fur. Her hair hangs down in a braid. After listening intently to the sound of the file, she places candle on sideboard and goes to telephone. She speaks in a whisper.

ALICE

Hello, Central. Hello, Central. (*Impatiently.*) Wake up! Wake up! Is that you, Central? Give me the station agent at Bedford Junction —quick. What? I *can't* speak louder. Well, you *must* hear me. Give me the station agent at Bedford Junction. No, there's always a man there all night. Hurry, please, hurry. (*There is a pause, during which the sound of the file grows louder.* ALICE *listens apprehensively.*) Hello, are you the station agent? Good! Listen! I am Miss Gardner, James K. Gardner's daughter.

Yes, James K. Gardner, the president of the road. This is his house. My mother and I are here alone. There are three men trying to break in. Yes, burglars, of course. My mother is very ill. If they frighten her the shock might—might be very serious. Wake up the crew, and send the wrecking train here—at once. Send—the—crew—of—the—wrecking train here—quick. What? Then fire up an engine and get it here as fast as you can.

VOICE (*calling from second story*)

Alice!

ALICE (*at telephone*)

Yes, you have. The up-track's clear until "52" comes along. That's not until——

VOICE (*louder*)

Alice!

ALICE (*with dismay*)

Mother! (*At telephone.*) Hello, hold the wire. Don't go away! (*Runs to curtains, parts*

them, and looks up as though speaking to some one at top of stairs.) Mother, why *aren't* you in bed?

VOICE

Is anything wrong, Alice?

ALICE

No, dear, no. I just came down to—get a book I forgot. Please go back, dearest.

VOICE

I heard you moving about, I thought you might be ill.

ALICE

No, dearest, but *you'll* be very ill if you don't keep in bed. Please, mother—at once. It's all right, it's all right.

VOICE

Yes, dear. Good-night.

ALICE

Good-night, mother. (*Returns quickly to telephone.*) Hello! Hello! Stop the engine at the foot of our lawn. Yes, yes, at the foot of our lawn. And when you have the house surrounded, when the men are all around the house, blow three whistles so I'll know you're here. What? Oh, that's all right. The burglars will be here. *I'll* see to that. All *you* have to do is to *get* here. If you don't, you'll lose your job! I say, if you don't, you'll lose your job, or I'm not the daughter of the president of this road. *Now, you jump!* And—wait—hello— (*Turns from telephone.*) He's jumped.

(The file is now drawn harshly across the bolt of the window of the dining-room, and a piece of wood snaps. With an exclamation, ALICE blows out the candle and exits. The shutters of the windows are opened, admitting the faint glow of moonlight. The window is raised and the ray of a dark-lantern is swept about the room. HATCH appears at window and puts one leg inside. He is an elderly man wearing a mask which hides the upper half of his face, a heavy overcoat, and a derby hat. But for the mask he might be mistaken for a respectable man of business. A pane of glass falls from the window and breaks on the sill.)

HATCH (*speaking over his shoulder*)

Hush! Be careful, can't you? (*He enters. He is followed by* "GRAND STAND" HARRY, *a younger man of sporting appearance. He also wears a mask, and the brim of his gray Alpine hat is pulled over his eyes. Around his throat he wears a heavy silk muffler.*) It's all right. Come on. Hurry up, and close those shutters.

HARRY (*to* REDDY *outside*)

Give me the bag, Reddy. (REDDY *appears at window. He is dressed like a Bowery tough. His face is blackened with burnt cork. His hair is of a brilliant red. He wears an engineer's silk cap with visor. To* HARRY *he passes a half-filled canvas bag. On his shoulder he carries another. On entering he slips and falls forward on the floor.*)

HATCH

Confound you!

HARRY

Hush, you fool.

HATCH

Has he broken anything?

REDDY (*on floor, rubbing his head*)

I've broke my head.

HATCH

That's no loss. Has he smashed that silver?

HARRY (*feeling in bag*)

It feels all right. (HATCH *cautiously parts curtains at centre and exits into hall.*)

REDDY (*lifts bag*)

We got enough stuff in this bag already without wasting time on *another* house.

HARRY

Wasting time! Time's money in *this* house. Look at this silver. That's the beauty of working the night *after* Christmas; everybody's presents is lying about loose, and everybody's too

tired celebrating to keep awake. (*Lifts silver loving-cup.*) Look at that cup!

REDDY

I'd rather look at a cup of coffee.

HARRY (*contemptuously*)

Ah, you!

REDDY

Well, I can't make a meal out of silver ice pitchers, can I? I've been through three refrigerators to-night, and nothing in any of 'em but bottles of *milk! Milk!*

HARRY

Get up, get up, get to work.

REDDY

The folks in this town are the stingiest I ever see. *I* won't visit 'em again, no matter how often they ask me. (*Rising and crossing to buffet.*) I wonder if these folks is vegetarians, too. (HATCH *enters.*)

HATCH

It seems all right. There's no light, and everybody's quiet. (*To* HARRY.) You work the bedrooms. I'll clear away those things. Don't be rough, now.

HARRY

I know my business. Give me the light. (*Takes lantern and exits centre.*)

HATCH

Hist, Reddy. Reddy, leave that alone. That's not safe. (*Removes silver from sideboard to bag.*)

REDDY

I know it ain't, governor. I'm lookin' for somethin' to eat. (*He kneels in front of buffet, and opens door.*)

HATCH

No, you're not! You're not here to eat. Come and give me a hand with this stuff.

REDDY

Gee! I've found a bottle of whiskey. (*Takes bottle from buffet and begins to pull at the cork.*)

HATCH

Well, you put it right back where you found it.

REDDY

I know a better place than that to put it.

HATCH

How many times have I told you I'll not let you drink in business hours?

REDDY

Oh, just once, governor; it's a cruel, cold night. (*Coughs.*) I need it for medicine.

HATCH

No, I tell you!

REDDY

Just *one* dose. Here's to you. (*Drinks.*) Oh, Lord! (*He sputters and coughs violently.*)

HATCH (*starts toward him*)

Hush! Stop that, you fool.

REDDY

Oh, I'm poisoned! That's benzine, governor. What do you think of that? Benzine! It's burned me throat out.

HATCH

I wish it had burned your tongue out! *Can't* you keep still?

REDDY

Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! Think of a man puttin' benzine in a whiskey bottle! That's dishonest, that is. Using a revenue stamp twice is defraudin' the Government. I could have him arrested for that. (*Pause.*) If I wanted to. (*Pause.*) But I don't want to.

HATCH

Oh, quit that—and come here. Get out the window, and I'll hand the bag to you. Put it under the seat of the wagon, and cover it up with

the lap robe. (REDDY *steps to centre door and, parting the curtains, leans into the hall beyond, listening.*)

REDDY

Go slow. I ain't to leave here till Harry is safe on the ground floor again.

HATCH

Don't you worry about Harry. He won't get into trouble.

REDDY

Sure *he* won't. It's *me* and *you* he'll get into trouble. You hadn't ought to send *him* to do second-story work.

HATCH (*contemptuously*)

No?

REDDY

No; he's too tender-hearted. A second-story worker ought to use his gun.

HATCH

Oh, you! You'll fire your gun too often some day.

REDDY

No, I won't. I did once, but I didn't do it again for six years. But Harry—ah, he's too tender-hearted. If Harry was a chicken thief, before he'd wring a chicken's neck he'd give it laughing-gas. Why, you remember the lady that woke up and begged him to give her back a gold watch because it belonged to her little girl who was dead. Well—it turned out the little girl wasn't dead. It turned out the little girl was a big boy, alive and kicking—especially kicking. He kicked me into a rose-bush.

HATCH

That'll do. Harry's learning his trade. He'll pick it up in time.

REDDY

About time he picked up something. Remember the Gainesville Bank; where he went away

leaving ten thousand dollars in the back of the safe. Why didn't he pick *that* up?

HATCH

Because it wasn't there. Bank directors always say that—to make us feel bad. Hush! (HARRY *enters, carrying his silk muffler, which now is wrapped about a collection of jewels and watches.*)

HATCH

That's quick work. What did you get?

HARRY

Some neck strings, and rings, and two watches. (*He spreads the muffler on the table. The three men examine the jewelry.*)

HATCH

That looks good. Who's up there?

HARRY

Only an old lady and a young girl in the room over this. And she's a beauty, too. (*Sentiment-*

ally.) Sleeping there just as sweet and peaceful——

REDDY

Ah, why don't you give her back *her* watch? Maybe she's *another* dead daughter.

HATCH

That's all right, Harry. That's good stuff. Pick up that bag, Reddy. We can go now. (HARRY *places muffler and jewels in an inside coat pocket.* REDDY *takes up the dark-lantern.*)

REDDY

Go? Not till I've got something to eat.

HATCH

No, you don't. You can wait till later for something to eat.

REDDY

Yes, I can wait till later for something to eat, but I can wait better if I eat now. (*Exit into pantry.*)

HATCH

Confound him. If I knew the roads around here as well as he does, I'd drive off and leave him. That appetite of his will send us to jail some day.

HARRY

Well, to tell the truth, governor, a little supper wouldn't hurt my feelings. (*Goes to buffet.*) I wonder where old man Gardner keeps his Havanas? I'd like a Christmas present of a box of cigars. Are there any over here?

HATCH

I didn't look. I gave up robbing tills when I was quite a boy. (*Carries bag toward window and looks out.*)

HARRY (*takes box of cigars from buffet*)

Ah, here they are. (*With disgust.*) Domestics! What do you think of that? Made in Vermont. The "Admiral Dewey" cigar. Gee! What was the use of Dewey's taking Manila, if I've got to smoke Vermont cigars? (REDDY *enters, carrying tray with food and a bottle.*)

REDDY

Say, fellers, look at this layout. These is real people in this house. I found cold birds, and ham, and all kinds of pie, and real wine. (*Places tray on right end of table.*) Sit down, and make yourselves perfectly at home.

HARRY

Well, well, that does look good. (*Places box of cigars at upper end of table, and seats himself.*) Better have a bite, governor.

HATCH

No, I tell you. (*He sits angrily in chair at left end of table, with his face turned toward the curtains.*)

REDDY

Oh, come on. It don't cost *you* nothing. (*The light from the candle is seen approaching the curtains.*)

HATCH

Hush! Look there! (*He rises, lifting his chair above his head, and advances on tiptoe to*

right of curtains, where he stands with the chair raised as though to strike. HARRY *points revolver at curtains.* REDDY *shifts the lantern to his left hand and, standing close to* HARRY, *also points a revolver.* ALICE *appears between curtains. She is dressed as before, and in her left hand carries the candle, while the forefinger of her right hand is held warningly to her lips. For an instant she pauses, in the ring of light from the lantern.*)

ALICE (*whispering*)

Hush! Don't make a noise. Don't make a noise, please. (*There is a long pause.*)

REDDY

Well, I'll be hung!

ALICE (*to* REDDY)

Please don't make a noise.

HATCH (*in a threatening whisper*)

Don't *you* make a noise.

ALICE

I don't mean to. My mother is asleep upstairs and she is very ill. And I don't want to wake her—and I don't want you to wake her, either.

REDDY

Well, I'll be hung!

HATCH (*angrily*)

Who else is in this house?

ALICE

No one but mother and the maid-servants, and they're asleep. You woke me, and I hoped you'd go without disturbing mother. But when you started in making a night of it, I decided I'd better come down and ask you to be as quiet as possible. My mother is not at all well. (*Takes cigar box off table.*) Excuse me; you've got the wrong cigars. Those are the cigars father keeps for his friends. Those he smokes he hides over here. (*Places box on buffet and takes out a larger box, with partitions for cigars, matches, and cigarettes. As she moves about,* REDDY *keeps*

her well in the light of the lantern.) Try those. I'm afraid you've a very poor supper. When father is away, we have such a small family. I can't see what you've— Would you mind taking that light out of my eyes, and pointing it at that tray?

HATCH (*sharply*)

Don't you do it. Keep the gun on her.

ALICE

Oh, I don't mind his pointing the gun at me, so long as he does not point that light at me. It's most—embarrassing. (*Sternly.*) Turn it down there, please. (REDDY *lets light fall on tray.*) Why, that's *cooking* sherry you've got. You can't drink *that!* Let me get you some whiskey.

REDDY (*covering her with lantern*)

No, you don't. That's not whiskey. It's benzine.

ALICE

You don't mean to say that that benzine bottle is there *still?* I told Jane to take it away.

REDDY (*dryly*)

Well, Jane didn't do it.

ALICE

Now, isn't that just like Jane? I told her it might set fire to the house and burn us alive.

REDDY

It nearly burned me alive.

ALICE

I'm so sorry. (*Takes from buffet a tray holding whiskey bottle, siphon, and three glasses.*) Here, this is what you want. But, perhaps, you don't like Scotch.

HATCH

Don't you touch that, Reddy. (*Returns to chair at left of table.*)

REDDY

Why not?

ALICE (*pours whiskey into a glass*)

Yes; why not? It's not poison. There's nothing wrong with this bottle. If you're afraid, I'll prove it to you. Just to show you there's not a trace of hard feelings. (*Drinks and coughs violently.*)

REDDY (*sympathetically*)

She's got the benzine bottle, too.

ALICE

No. I'm not quite used to that. (*To* HARRY.) Excuse me, but aren't you getting tired holding that big pistol? Don't you think you might put it down now, and help me serve this supper? (HARRY *does not move.*) No? Well, then, let the colored gentleman help me. (HARRY *and* REDDY *wheel sharply, each pointing his revolver.*)

REDDY

Colored man! Where?

HARRY

Colored man! It's a trap! (*Seeing no one, they turn.*)

ALICE (*to* REDDY)

Oh, pardon me. Aren't you a colored person?

REDDY

Me! Colored? You never see a colored man with hair like that, did you? (*Points lantern at his head.*) This isn't my real face, lady. Why, out of office hours, I've a complexion like cream and roses. (*Indignantly.*) Colored man!

ALICE

I beg your pardon, but I can't see very well. Don't you think it would be more cheerful if we had a little more light?

HATCH

No! (*To* REDDY.) Drop that. We've got to go. (*To* ALICE.) And before we go, I've got to fix you.

ALICE

Fix me—how "fix" me?

HATCH

I'm sorry, miss, but it's your own fault. You shouldn't have tried to see us. Now that you *have*, before we leave, I've got to tie you to a chair—and gag you.

ALICE

Oh, really—all of that?

HATCH

I can't have you raising the neighborhood until we get well away.

ALICE

I see. But—gagged—I'll look so foolish.

REDDY

Well, there's no hurry. We won't get well away until I've had something to eat.

ALICE

Quite right. (*To* HATCH.) You can tie me in a chair later, Mr. ——. But now you must

remember that I am your hostess. (*To* REDDY.) You'll find plates in the pantry, please.

REDDY

Oh, I don't use them things.

ALICE

You'll use "them things" when you eat with me. Go, do as I tell you, please. (REDDY *exits*.) And you—put away that silly gun and help him.

HATCH

Stay where you are.

HARRY

Oh, what's the rush, governor? She can't hurt nobody. And I'm near starved, too. (*Exit into pantry*.)

HATCH

This is the last time I take *you* out.

ALICE (*arranging the food upon the table*)

Now, why are you so peevish to everybody? Why don't you be sociable, and take some supper? (*Glances at sideboard.*) You seem to have taken everything else. Oh, that reminds me. Would you object to loaning me about—four, six —about six of our knives and forks? Just for this supper. I suppose we can borrow from the neighbors for breakfast. Unless you've been calling on the neighbors, too.

HATCH

Oh, anything to oblige a lady. (*Threateningly.*) But no tricks, now!

ALICE

Oh, I can't promise that, because I mightn't be able to keep my promise. (HATCH *brings silver knives and forks from the bag.*)

HATCH

I'll risk all the tricks you know. Nobody's got much the better of me in the last twenty years.

ALICE

Have you been a burglar twenty years? You must have begun very young. I can't see your face very well, but I shouldn't say you were—over forty. Do take that mask off. It looks so—unsociable. Don't be afraid of me. I've a perfectly shocking memory for faces. Now, I'm sure that under that unbecoming and terrifying exterior you are hiding a kind and fatherly countenance. Am I right? (*Laughs.*) Why do you wear it?

HATCH (*roughly*)

To keep my face warm.

ALICE

Oh, pardon me; my mistake. (*A locomotive whistle is heard at a distance.* ALICE *listens eagerly. As the whistle dies away and is not repeated, her face shows her disappointment.*)

HATCH

What was that? There's no trains this time of night.

ALICE (*speaking partly to herself*)

It was a freight train, going the other way.

HATCH (*suspiciously*)

The other way? The other way from where?

ALICE

From where it started. Do you know, I've always wanted to meet a burglar. But it's so difficult. They go out so seldom.

HATCH

Yes; and they arrive so late.

ALICE (*laughing*)

Now, that's much better. It's so nice of you to have a sense of humor. While you're there, just close those blinds, please, so that the neighbors can't see what scandalous hours we keep. And then you can make a light. This is much too gloomy for a supper party.

HATCH (*closing shutters*)

Yes; if those were shut it might be safer. (*He closes shutters and turns on the two electric lights.* REDDY *and* HARRY *enter, carrying plates.*)

HARRY

We aren't regular waiters, miss, but we think we're pretty good for amateurs.

REDDY

We haven't forgot nothing. Not even napkins. Have some napkins? (*Places a pile of folded napkins in front of* ALICE. *Then sits at head of table,* HARRY *to lower right of table.* ALICE *moves her chair away from the table, but keeping* REDDY *on her right.* HATCH *sits still further away from the table on her left.*)

ALICE

Thanks. Put the plates down there. And may I help you to some——

REDDY (*taking food in fingers*)

Oh, we'll help ourselves.

ALICE

Of course you're accustomed to helping yourselves, aren't you? (*To* HATCH.) Won't you join them?

HATCH

No. (*Through the scene which follows,* REDDY *and* HARRY *continue to eat and drink heartily.*)

ALICE

No? Well, then, while they're having supper, you and I will talk. If you're going to gag me soon, I want to talk while I can. (*Rises and hands box to him.*) Have a cigar?

HATCH (*takes cigar*)

Thanks.

ALICE (*standing with hand on back of chair*)

Now, I want to ask you some questions. You are an intelligent man. Of course, you must be, or you couldn't have kept out of jail for twenty years. To get on in your business, a man must

be intelligent, and he must have nerve, and courage. Now—with those qualities, why, may I ask—why are you so stupid as to be a burglar?

HARRY

Stupid!

REDDY

Well, I like that!

HATCH

Stupid? Why, I make a living at it.

ALICE

How much of a living?

HATCH

Ten thousand a year.

ALICE

Ten thousand—well, suppose you made *fifty* thousand. What good is even a hundred thousand for *one* year, if to get it you risk going to

prison for twenty years? That's not sensible. Merely as a business proposition, to take the risk you do for ten thousand dollars is stupid, isn't it? I can understand a man's risking twenty years of his life for some things—a man like Peary or Dewey, or Santos-Dumont. They took big risks for big prizes. But there's thousands of men in this country, not half as clever as you are, earning ten thousand a year—without any risk of going to jail. None of *them* is afraid to go out in public with his wife and children. *They're* not afraid to ask a policeman what time it is. They don't have to wear black masks, nor ruin their beautiful complexions with burnt cork.

REDDY

Ah, go on. Who'd give *me* a job?

ALICE

Whom did you ever ask for one?

REDDY (*to* HARRY)

Pass me some more of that pie like mother used to make.

HATCH

Yes; there are clerks and shopkeepers working behind a counter twenty-four hours a day, but they don't make ten thousand a year, and no one ever hears of *them*. There's no *fame* in their job.

ALICE

Fame! Oh, how interesting. Are you—a celebrity?

HATCH

I'm quite as well known as I care to be. Now, to-morrow, all the papers will be talking about this. There'll be columns about us three. No one will know we are the ones they're talking about——

REDDY

I hope not.

HATCH

But the men in our profession will know. And they'll say, "That was a neat job of So-

and-so's last night." That's fame. Why, we've got a reputation from one end of this country to the other.

HARRY

That's right! There's some of us just as well known as—Mister—Santos—Dumont.

REDDY

And we fly just as high, too.

ALICE (*to* HATCH)

I suppose *you*—I suppose you're quite a *famous* burglar?

REDDY

Him? Why, he's as well known as Billy the Kid.

ALICE

Billy the Kid, really! He sounds *so* attractive. But I'm afraid—I don't think—that I ever heard of *him*.

REDDY

Never heard of Billy the Kid? What do you think of that?

HATCH

Well, then, I'm as well known as "Brace" Phillips, the Manhattan Bank robber.

REDDY

Sure he is.

HATCH

Don't tell me you never heard of him?

ALICE

I'm afraid not.

HATCH

Why, he's a head-liner. He's as well known as George Post. Coppy Farrell? Billy Porter?

ALICE

No. There you are. Now, you claim there is fame in this profession, and you have named

five men who are at the top of it, and I've never heard of one of them. And I read the papers, too.

REDDY

Well, there's *other* ladies who have heard of us. Real ladies. When I was doing my last bit in jail, I got a thousand letters from ladies asking for me photograph, and offering to marry me.

ALICE

Really? Well, that only proves that men—*as husbands*—are more desirable in jail than out. (*To* HATCH.) No; it's a poor life.

HATCH

It's a poor life you people lead with us to worry you. There's seventy millions of you in the United States, and only a few of us, and yet we keep you guessing all the year round. Why, we're the last thing you think of at night when you lock the doors, we're the first thing you think of in the morning when you feel for the silver basket. We're just a few up against sev-

enty millions. I tell you there's fame and big money and a free life in my business.

ALICE

Yes; it's a free life until you go to jail. It's this way. You're barbarians, and there's no place for you in a civilized community—except in jail. Everybody is working against you. Every city has its police force; almost every house nowadays has a private watchman. And if we want to raise a hue and cry after you, there are the newspapers, and the telegraph, and the telephone (*nods at telephone*) and the cables all over the——

HATCH (*grimly*)

Thank you. One moment, please. (*Throws open overcoat, showing that it is lined with burglars' jimmies, chisels, and augers.*)

ALICE

My! What an interesting coat. It looks like a tool chest. Just the coat for an automobile trip.

HATCH

Harry, cut those telephone wires. (*Hands barbed-wire cutter to* HARRY. *To* ALICE.) Thank you for reminding me.

ALICE

Oh, not at all. You've nothing to thank me for. (HARRY *goes to telephone. To* HARRY.) Don't make a noise doing that. Don't wake my mother. (*To* HATCH.) She's nervous, and she's ill, and if you wake her, or frighten her, I'll keep the police after you until every one of you is in jail.

HATCH

You won't keep after us very far when I've tied you up. Bring me those curtain cords, Harry.

ALICE

Oh, really, that's too ridiculous. (*Listens apprehensively.*)

HATCH

Sorry I had to bust up your still alarm, but after we go, we can't have you chatting with

the police. If you hadn't so kindly given me a tip about the telephone, I might have gone off and clean forgot that. (HARRY *takes curtain cords from window curtains.*)

REDDY

I'm afraid pretty polly talked too much that time. We ain't all stupid.

ALICE

No; so I see, so I see. It was careless of me. But everybody you call upon may not be so careless.

HATCH

Well, I've won out for twenty years. I've never been in jail.

ALICE

Don't worry. You're young. I told you you looked young. Your time is coming. In these days there's no room for burglars. You belong to the days of stage-coaches. You're old-fashioned now. You're trying to fight civilization,

that's what you're trying to do. You may keep ahead for a time, but in a long race I'll back civilization to win.

HATCH

Is that so? Well, Miss Civilization, you've had your say, and I hope you feel better. (*To* HARRY.) Give me that silk muffler of yours. (*To* ALICE.) If civilization is going to help you, it's got to hurry.

ALICE

You don't mean to say you really are going to gag me?

HATCH

I am.

ALICE

My! But I shall look silly. (*With her face turned right she listens apprehensively.*)

HARRY (*coming down with curtain cords, and taking muffler from his pocket*)

I've got the stuff in this muffler.

HATCH

Well, give me that, too. (*Shows inside coat pocket.*) I'll put it in the safe. (HARRY *places muffler on table, exposing jewelry.* HATCH *begins placing the ornaments one at a time in his pocket. To* ALICE.) What is it? What did you hear?

ALICE

I—I thought I heard my mother moving about.

HATCH

Well, she'd better not move about.

ALICE (*fiercely*)

You'd better not wake her. (*Sees the jewels.*) Oh! Look at the "graft," or is it "swag"? Which is it?

HATCH (*to* HARRY)

Cover 'em up; cover it up. (HARRY *tries to hide the jewels with one hand, while he passes a lady's watch to* HATCH.)

HARRY (*to* ALICE)

That's *your* watch. I'm sorry it has to go.

ALICE

I'm not. It's the first time it ever did go. And, oh, thank you for taking that big brooch. It's a gift of father's, so I had to wear it, but it's so unbecoming. (*She listens covertly.*)

HATCH

Put your hat on them. Cover them up. (HARRY *partly covers jewels with his hat.* HATCH *lifts a diamond necklace.*)

ALICE

I suppose you know your own business—but *that is paste.*

HATCH

Do you want to be gagged *now?*

ALICE

Pardon me, of course you know what you want. (*Notices another necklace.*) Oh, that's

Mrs. Warren's necklace! So you called on her, too, did you? Isn't she attractive!

REDDY

We didn't ask for the lady of the house. They ain't always as sociable as you are.

ALICE

Well, that's her necklace. You got that at the house on the hill with the red roof—the house has the red roof, not the hill. (*She recognizes, with an exclamation, a gold locket and chain which* HATCH *is about to place in his pocket.*) Oh! that's Mrs. Lowell's locket! How could you! (*She snatches locket from* HATCH, *and clasps it in both hands. She rises indignantly.*) How dared you take that!

HATCH

Put that down!

ALICE (*wildly and rapidly*)

No; I will not. Do you know what that means to that woman? She cares more for that

than for anything in this world. Her husband used to wear this. (*Points.*) That's a lock of their child's hair. The child's dead, and the husband's dead, and that's all she has left of either of them. And you *took* it, *you brutes!*

REDDY

Of course we took it. Why does she wear it where everybody can see it?

HATCH (*savagely*)

Keep quiet, you fool.

ALICE

She *wore* it? You took it—*from her?*

HATCH

We didn't hurt her. We only frightened her a bit. (*Angrily.*) And we'll frighten you before we're done with you, Miss Civilization!

ALICE (*defiantly, her voice rising*)

Frighten me! You—you with your faces covered! You're not men enough. You're afraid

to even steal from men. You rob *women* when they're alone—at night. (*Holds up locket.*) Try to take that from me!

VOICE (*calling*)

Alice—Alice!

ALICE

Mother! Oh, I forgot, I forgot. (*The burglars rise and move toward her menacingly.*) Please, please keep quiet. For God's sake, don't—let —her—know!

VOICE

Alice, what's wrong? Who are you talking to? (ALICE *runs to the curtains, with one hand held out to the burglars, entreating silence.*)

ALICE

I'm—I'm talking to James, the coachman. One of the horses is ill. Don't come down, mother. Don't come down. Go back to bed. He's going now, right away. He came for some medicine. It's all right. Good-night, mother.

VOICE

Can't I help?

ALICE (*vehemently*)

No; no. Good-night, mother.

VOICE

Good-night.

HATCH (*fiercely, to* HARRY)

That's enough of this! We can't leave here with the whole house awake. And there's a coachman, too. She'll wake him next. He'll have the whole damned village after us. (*To* ALICE.) That woman upstairs and you have got to have your tongues stopped.

ALICE (*standing in front of curtains*)

You try to go near that woman! She's ill, she's feeble, she's my—mother! You dare to touch her.

HATCH

Get out of my way.

ALICE

She's ill, you cowards. It will kill her. You'll have to kill me before you get through this door.

HATCH (*savagely*)

Well, then, if it comes to that— (*Three locomotive whistles are heard from just outside the house.* ALICE *throws up her hands hysterically.*)

REDDY

Ah! At last! They've come. They've come!

HATCH (*fiercely*)

They've come! What is it? What does that mean? (REDDY *runs to window and opens the shutters.*)

ALICE (*jubilantly*)

It means—it means that twenty men are crossing that lawn. It means that while you sat drinking there, Civilization was racing toward you at seventy miles an hour!

HATCH

Damnation! We're trapped. Get to the wagon—quick! No. Leave the girl alone. We've no time for that. Drop that stuff. That way. That way.

REDDY (*at window*)

No. Get back! Get back! It's too late. There's hundreds of them out there.

HATCH (*running to centre door*)

Out here! This way! Quick!

ALICE (*mockingly*)

Yes; come! You don't dare come this way *now!* (*She drags open the curtains, disclosing* CAPTAIN LUCAS *and two other policemen. For an instant they stand, covering the burglars with revolvers.* REDDY *runs to window. He is seized by an entering crowd of men in the oil-stained blue jeans of engineers and brakemen.*)

CAPTAIN LUCAS

Hold up your hands, all of you! I guess I know you. (*With his left hand he tears off*

HATCH'S *mask.*) "Joe" Hatch—at last. (*Pulls off* HARRY'S *mask.*) And Harry Hayes. I thought so. And that's—the "Kid." The whole gang. (*To the police.*) Good work, boys. (*To* ALICE.) My congratulations, Miss Gardner. They're the worst lot in the country. You're a brave young lady. You ought——

ALICE (*speaking with an effort and swaying slightly*)

Hush, please. Don't—don't alarm my mother. Mother's not as strong as—as I am. (*Her eyes close, and she faints across the arm of the Chief of Police as the*

CURTAIN FALLS.